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IN AMADEUS

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designed by

Ian Robinson

September 22 to October 31

Drama Theatre
Sydney Opera House



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Rocky



THEATRE

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THEATRE AUSTRALIA OCTOBER 1981

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COMMENT

Artists and critics

The empathy that often exists between artists and critics might be said to have reached a head in Adelaide over the past few weeks. A fairly ragged tension, in particular, the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust and the State Theatre Company on the one side, against the arts masters of the Adelaide Advertiser on the other.

Moves in the fight have included heavy criticism of the STC's current season by the paper, in particular of the revue *Squars* and more specifically of the content and cost (\$3,000) of a full-page advertisement for that show in the *Advertiser* (being the head that feeds one?). Further adverse comment on the general running and control of arts bodies in South Australia led the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust to withdraw all their publicity, including paid advertisements, from the newspaper.

Even SA Arts Minister, Murray Hill, has been caught in the cross-fire, writing another to condemn the "left-wing" content of *Squars*, not to let the issue of future funding setbacks appear in any way partisan. He has, however, gone so far as to go on record as saying "we maintain the threat of arts support at all levels in the state, but we reserve the right to withhold allocations where wasteful expenditure has occurred". And further, that he hopes the standard of STC productions will rise again when Jim Sherman takes up the directorship.

It is sad when bad blood comes to exist between arts companies and personnel, and the poets, for they are two aspects of the same industry and very much interdependent. It could be said that journalism is the subsidiary activity, relying on the primary product of the art as grist for its mill, but equally the art cannot exist in a vacuum: its fundamental requirement is an audience and it would be hard pressed to find a sufficient one without the dissemination of information and widening of the debate that the media provide.

The job of the critic is, by definition, likely to bring him into disfavor with those he criticizes. But the label is often a misnomer in that it has the unfortunate connotation of antagonistic criticism. The reviewer is rarely given credit for his positive responses, which are in most cases in the majority and too often remembered only for his negative ones. The contemporary attitude of some to reviewer is notorious worldwide, but in this country the level of respect accorded to critics is particularly low.

In most cases the campaign is unfair, misquoting an Australian performing arts

in the subsidiary activity, relying on the reviewers are certainly no "worse" than their international counterparts. AS a magazine of record and review we have from time to time been in conflict with certain artists and producers over the role of the reviewer in the performing arts. Our attitude has always been that while it is one of our major functions to promote theatre in the broad sense, this encompasses giving not only praise where praise is due, but also objective and honest criticism where it is due. To encourage audiences to believe that a poor production in good would have the long-term effect of keeping them away from theatres, to praise artists for a production or performance that did not succeed could be to hinder them from finding where success might lie.

It is ironic for both sides that theatre is probably the only industry of which the critics are also the front line of advertising, yet it is essential to the reviewer's integrity that he remain the scepticism to simply write "gulls" in the mistaken belief that this is promoting an art form he believes. He must feel, with Shaw, that "the dramatic critic is the servant of a high art and not a mere advertiser of entertainments." Equally, the artist can hope for, in the words of Charles Marowitz, "the best criticism" which because of its honesty and substance unconditionally has the effect of promotional copy.

Where there are issues it is the role of the media to enter the dialogue, but objectively and not with guns blazing. The recent month faced off in Adelaide seems to have become somewhat personal on both sides, which can do nothing but lower esteem for both the writers and the companies involved. Mutual respect is the key not only to good relations, but also mutual growth, and it is to be strongly rumored rather than letting the situation slide where to quote Shaw again, theatre "instead of looking up to (the press) as their guide, philosopher and friend, they regard (it) merely as the author of a series of weekly outrages on their profession and privacy".

In the mean time, the General Manager of the State Theatre Company, Paul Hill, has handed in his resignation. Not that this is directly attributable to the recent press criticism though his comments (see INFO) make it clear that he has not been happy with Adelaide media response. No doubt he would agree with this final quote from GBS: "I have never been able to see how the duties of a critic, which consist largely of making painful remarks in public about the most sensitive of his fellow creatures, can be reconciled with the manners of a gentleman."

MOMMA'S TRIUMPH

Momma's Little Horror Show, currently playing at the Kitzas Komodo, Amsterdam, has already been to Rotterdam, Groningen and a number of other provincial cities in Holland as part of its tour of State Theatres in Germany and Holland.

So far it has met extremely favourable response as it follows in the footsteps of the *Circus Oz* tour completed earlier this year. Of the fourteen major reviews it has received, thirteen have been highly favourable, the fourteenth being penned by a rock'n'roll writer who hated every minute of it, though his reaction does seem to have at least been partly dictated by his misunderstanding of the title — something which happened even in Australia.

It is believed that the French promoters are thinking of dropping "*Horror Show*" out of its title for *Momma's* provincial season in Paris at the Palais de Glace in République — a commercial season which is scheduled to run through December and into January.

Some quotes from the Dutch review translate as follows: from *Het Nieuwsblad* (Hague, circulation 200,000) "*Momma's* is visually spectacular, an exceptionally inventive production". Director Nigel Truitt-Elli's vision has been described as "eductive", one paper adding that "he embellishes the production so exquisitely and perfectly it is glowingly that we are won over".

Another read "*Momma's* breathes a typical Anglo-Saxon show atmosphere which gives an essentially simple story 'space-arcane overtones'". It also described the work of the puppets as "perfectly co-ordinated and brilliant".

Meanwhile, a Dutch Transport outfit, Airfast TNT, a transport business affiliated to our own TNT, has been giving substantial assistance with transport to the Australian Puppet Theatre (the group behind *Momma's*). After seeing the show in Amsterdam, one of their agents, a Mr Fred Vermeulen, was able to persuade his company to sponsor their tour. It is the first time the company has been successful in its bid for commercial sponsorship.

John Pinder, the producer of *Momma's*, and manager of the group's European tour, will be spending most of October/November in the United States, trying to secure an American season for the APT. But, at present, he says (speaking from La Jolla — the new venue at the Last Laugh), he is not very optimistic.

POSTHUMOUS PROMISES

The climate of uncertainty which hangs over Melbourne's *Penn Factory* — home of the Australian Performing Group for more than a decade and artistic spring-board for several generations of Australian playwrights, has prompted Administrator John Timlin to give notice to the building's new owners.

The APG office space at the *Penn Factory* will be retained. Speaking from Melbourne, Timlin said that although no promise to renovate and/or demolish the building had been made, it was becoming increasingly difficult to run the theatre in the present circumstances.

"John Bay's *Red Rag Celebration*, scheduled to open in the first week of September for a three week run will be our last production", he said. "And, with only one exception, that comprises our year's programme anyway". The exception is Val Kavan's *Art of Lobster Whisking* which, he says, had to be cut following the recent \$20,000 reduction in the APG's grant from the Theatre Board.

Timlin also said that negotiations were underway to build and equip a new 300 seat theatre at the Universal Workshop. Next year's programme for the APG already has three music-theatre productions scheduled for the guest theatre at the Universal Theatre are Tim Robertson's adaptation of *Peter Pan Shandy*, John Komer's *Jonah*, and Bill Hanna's *L'Annonciation*.

At a Writers' Guild meeting recently, Timlin recommended that a majority representation of writers be present on the Board of the APG. "At the moment, the APG is an actor's theatre", he said. "It needs to be re-structured. It should go back to being a writer's theatre as it was in 1970."

WHARF PROJECT

The effort of the NSW Budget Speech, delivered on August 26, 1981 on the Sydney Theatre Company's Wharf Project at Walsh Bay appears to be one of further delay.

While detailed designs and specifications for the building are now finalised and ready to go out to tender, the shortage of capital funds has meant that building contracts for the Wharf Project will again have to be deferred.

In his speech, the Premier, Mr Woollacott, did however give his personal assurance that the building would go ahead "as soon as practicable".



Momma's Little Horror Show. Photo: G. Harrison



John Timlin



Robert Longley

LOVEJOY FOR NIDA

Mr Robin Lovejoy has been appointed as Head of the Designer's and Director's Course at the National Institute of Dramatic Art. He will take up his appointment in February 1983.

Mr Lovejoy has had a distinguished career as an actor, designer and director on theatre, opera and television. In 1956 he won the Critics Award for his direction and design of *The Rivals*.

Most recently he has pursued a freelance career. He directed *Idemitsu* with Joan Sutherland, for the Australian Opera. For the Victorian State Opera he directed Bart's *The Pearl Fishers*, Debussy's *Pelléas and Melisande*, and the highly successful *Der Fliegende Holländer*.

He has been lecturing at NIDA on a freelance basis and last year he directed *The Ballad of the Sad Café* there.

ANPC ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

George Whaley has been appointed Artistic Director of the 1982 Australian National Playwright's Conference. The Chairman of the Conference is again David Williamson and Clem Gorman has been appointed Administrator.

ARMFIELD TO FREELANCE

Neil Armfield's resignation as Artistic Director at the Muntrod Theatre will take effect next March at the end of the current subscription season. Meanwhile he is busy with *Squanto* at the Universal Theatre in Melbourne. From there he returns to the Muntrod for *Eyes of the Winter* (Downstairs), and Steven Soderbergh's *Welcome the Angry World* (Upstairs).

According to Sue Hill, the Theatre Manager at Muntrod, the company feels under no pressure to fill the position. Armfield will vacate, and is waiting for someone "suitable" to appear.

Speaking from Melbourne, Armfield said he was looking forward to the challenge of being a freelance director. He also sounds very confident. "There is an awful lot of work around," he said. "And after two years with a secure job like the one I had at Muntrod, it's very easy to lose the sense of each own perspective, of why one does things a certain way."

"I'm really looking forward to working on different spaces with different companies. I was getting rather tired of the confines of the actor/audience relation-



Neil Armfield



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ship as it was shaped by the *Nimrod* Uptains.

"I'm also interested in doing more Australian work," he said, though he adds with considerable reason that he does not feel at liberty just now to discuss his programme next year.

TV/FILM WORKSHOP

The third film production and directing course, run by the Australian TV-Film Industry Workshop, is under way. Introduced in February 1981, the course is for those who do not have the opportunity to join a full-time government sponsored scheme such as that offered by the Australian Film and TV School, but would like to gain a working knowledge of video and film production and directing.

The 26 week course is divided into three parts — Introduction to Film and TV Production, Creative Director's Workshop, and Producing and Editing a Film. The instructor is Brian Adams in association with Basil Appleby and John Winbolt.

AWG MOTIONS

The first national Australian Writers' Guild conference was held at the Melbourne Town House in Carlton, between 11 and 14 August. Chaired by Cliff Green, it was attended by 90 playwrights and screenwriters from all over Australia, and it finished with the AWGIE Awards on Friday 14.

Of the twenty motions passed, number 66 specifically related to *TJ* and it reads as follows: "That the conference assures the funding bodies that the publications *Theatre Australia* and *Cinema Report*



Paul Rice

have a vital role to play in the cultural and artistic scene, and urges them to continue funding of these publications at at least present levels."

Other motions referred to the lack of opportunities for Australian playwrights in the current theatrical climate and deplored the lack of adequate venues and funding for their work, especially work of an innovative or experimental nature.

ILES RESIGNS

In the wake of media criticism of the State Theatre Company of SA's current season though not he says, because of it, STC General Manager Paul Iles has resigned from the company. He came to Adelaide at the tail end of George's season, stayed through the new regime of Kevin Palmer

and Nick Brought, and is currently among artistic director in the interim before Jim Shearman becomes Resident Director next April.

His lack he is "not the right person any more for the STC Theatre", he says "can only thrive on change and after two years the company is getting to the stage where its course is set on an exciting and ambitious plane. There is more that I can do for other drama companies than I can achieve here. The company is to have an artistic Artistic Director, with taste and it is still very exciting to be working so well with Jim Shearman in planning the 1982 season.

"However, I am delighted by the professionalism and lack of substance support for an adequately adventurous program. The resignation had nothing to do with my relationship with either the Board of Governors or the new direction of the company. It is not another art-busting. I have made my contribution."

Paul Iles will be free-lancing in future, and his first commitment will probably be with the new Northern Queensland Theatre Company for whom he has already acted as consultant.

SNIPPETS...

A new live theatre and dance, to be called the PITS will be established at the Canberra Rex Hotel. PITS, an abbreviation of Pit in the Sky will house a fully professional company of actors and musicians. Its first production in early September will be *The Naked Viceroy* Show by Gary Kerly and Tony Sattler... ARTS Ltd — a national non-profit organisation serving the arts in Australia on behalf of the private sector, recently distributed its nomination forms for the 1981 Business in the Arts Awards. The Awards recognise outstanding examples of corporate support for the arts in Australia. Closing date for nominations is Friday, September 25, 1981, and these should be made to ARTS RESEARCH, TRAINING AND SUPPORT Ltd, 9 Rush Street, Woolahra, NSW 2025. The Fairfield Players, in conjunction with the Fairfield Festival will present a play about the founding of Fairfield and the problems facing newcomers to the area. Set in the mid-nineteenth century, the production is being staged as a combined community arts project. Opening date is October 17, and the venue is Bessley Park Progress Hall, corner Minnie Road and Quarry Road, Bessley Park.

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SNOW BUZZ

by Norman Kennell

A take of more than \$1 million in 13 weeks from two productions at Sydney's Theatre Royal must be the showbiz success story of the year.

First it was Ronald Harwood's *The Dresser*, which set a new record with a gross of \$337,874 from an attendance of 88.54 percent of capacity for its six and a half week run.

That, however, was immediately topped by Richard Wherrett's Sydney Theatre Company production of the Fred Elth — Bob Fosse musical, *Chicago*, which in its six and a half week run took more than \$350,000 with an average attendance of 96.63 percent of capacity. It set another record in its fourth week by playing to 99.4 percent of capacity.

And as MLC Theatre Royal Company director Frederick J Gibson points out, that was with a top ticket price of \$14.90, compared with the \$15.57 50 he paid to see the show in New York. Gibson told me ticket prices have to rise soon, probably to \$18.00 at the Royal.

The Dresser was a joint production by the MLC Theatre Royal Company, Helen Montague, of London, Wilton Mackay, of Sydney, and the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, but for *Chicago*, which had already played four sell-out weeks at the Opera House Drama Theatre, the deal was a box-office split. Gibson provided the theatre and the promotion, the STC the production.

Gibson said he had lost money on two earlier STC transfers — Simon Gray's *Class of '67* and Bob Harber's *No Name, No Face, Devil* — but for those his involvement had been a guarantee against loss.

Chicago looked like a bigger gamble than either of those. After seeing the Broadway production, he had reported that "it did nothing for me" and that he doubted it could work outside America, a view he shared with most other Australian managements. Trust general manager Jeffrey Joynton-Smith told me "We would not have put a penny in it."

However, Gibson said he was a model of Brian Thomson's wit, the sketches for Roger Kirk's costumes and learned something of Wherrett's production ideas and there, coupled with the fact he had a theatre with a vacant date, persuaded him to take a chance. The rest, as they say, is history.



The Dresser — showbiz success story



Doreen Clarke — most produced of Australian women playwrights



Edward Woodward returning to Australia to play in *Private Lives*



Chicago — hit box office records

Gibson also said that being able to promote the show from the start as a two-week presentation was a big help.

Chicago is now at Melbourne's Comedy Theatre until Nov 30. It will be at the Adelaide Festival Centre from Nov 26 to Dec 2, then will open a seven Sydney season at the Royal on New Year's Eve.

And talking of takings, that schizoidly tamer *Snow of Music*, one of the biggest money spinners of all time, looks set to do it again. A month before the London revival opened on Aug 17 there was \$2 million in hand, the biggest advance in West End history, according to producer Ross Taylor.

Doreen Clarke must be the most-produced of Australian women playwrights. Her works have been staged in Sydney, Melbourne and Darwin. Her newest, *The Sad Songs of Annie Sands* opens in Adelaide's Prince Theatre Nov 20, an STC of SA production directed by Margaret Dash, adapted by Stephen Curtis and in the cast Isabel Kirk, Stuart McCreery, Jacqui Phillips and Christine Woodland.

I hear Edward (*Breaker Morant*) Woodward will be back in Australia next month for a concert and legal tour. He'll be doing Coward's *Private Lives*, following, as I understand it, in the wake of the club and country centre circuit tour recently made by fellow-Poms Leslie Phillips and Andrew Sachs with *Not Now Darling*.

Another visitor next month will be former film star Stewart Granger, here to promote his autobiography, *Sparks Fly Upward*.

Concourse, journal of the American Chamber of Commerce in Australia, reports that a recent survey showed a night out in Sydney costs nine pence more than in New York. According to the study, which covered rentals, entertainment and general costs, all had risen faster here than in other cities examined.

A black and white close-up portrait of actress Jackie Weaver. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. Her hair is dark and styled in a short, wavy bob. She is wearing a dark-colored top with a light-colored polka dot pattern. The background is out of focus, showing some indistinct shapes and light.

spotlight

A LIFE IN THE DAY OF JACKIE WEAVER

A LIFE IN THE DAY OF JACKI WEAVER

rrrrRRRRR.

"Blork. It's 3.00am, I have a film call at 5.00am, a make-up call, then hair at 6.15am and wardrobe at 6.45am. We'll be ready to start shooting at 7.15am. I'm playing Dolly Grey who was Squizzy Taylor's first 'moff'. Nobody is quite sure whether he married her, but we do know that when she became too old for work on the street, she switched to running one of his brothels.

There's only one scene to shoot today so I'll be finished at 10.00am, which is just as well. I have a day's rehearsal to follow, then a first night of *There's Playing Our Song* followed by a party for the investors in the *Squizzy* film.

First thing I always take a lot of Vitamin C. Last night I had quite a lot to drink — which for me means three glasses of champagne, so I take a Benecora multi-B first as well. Then I wash my hair, have a quick cup of tea and make my eleven-year-old son's lunch and lay out his school uniform.

I'll phone him from the set at about 8.00am — always do, I like to check that he has found his clean socks, his mouth, his excursion note and the money that I've left on the fridge. Of course he has someone to look after him, but I always ring.

My breakfast is provided on location. They feed us as well with porridge, jaffles, toast, I usually put on weights during filming. Actually I put on a stone during *Squizzy*!

When that's all over, I climb back into my Levi-Strauss jeans (I take the same size as my son's), a jumper and my R. M. Williams elastic-sole boots, and leave for my movement lesson. It's a group class, we are all actors and we spend the hour doing general movement, exercises and a bit of choreography.

I'm always changing my clothes. This time I peel off leotards, tights and lace-up ballet shoes, climb back into jeans and things and dash off to a singing lesson nearby. This session is an individual one where I do lots of deep breathing and scales. Some days my music lesson gives me a bit of a headache, even though it only lasts half an hour.

After that it's off to a rehearsal in the city. Fortunately, nearly all my work is within a five mile radius of the city.

Today we are rehearsing Act Two, I have to cry quite a lot, and the stage manager is so moved, he cries too.

When we break at 1.30pm, I go and see my agent Gloria Payton. I pick up my weekly cheque — that's rehearsal money, and my mail, of which there is quite a stack. Today I've got ten requests for personal items of clothing to be auctioned at charity functions. I've also got a couple of requests for reggies. Celebrity Recipe Requests. There's a letter from a little girl I sponsored in Bolivia — she's five years old and her name is Margarita. I love getting her letters.

There are some bills, and several fan letters, some from kids who want to act, the others from middle-aged ladies who want to mother me. I think I'm everybody's idea of a favourite niece.

Next I'll go and see Kerry Patterson — also in the agency. She looks after all the girls and does things like take phone calls and pass on messages. Every week I get at least one offer of a TV commercial. She'll say to them that she thinks it's unlikely I'll do the ad, I've only done about eight in 20 years.

Kerry has a film script for me to read with a view to me doing it in nine months, after the play is finished, and she's also got a few messages for me from friends who couldn't find me at home.

But I've also got some shopping to do. I grab a health shake — which is full of eggs and yoghurt and fruit juice, and head off for David Jones' cosmetic counter. When the women at the make-up counter see me coming, they stand up and cheer. I spend a fortune there — at least \$100. Lipstick is a major item, I need two on either side of the stage (in case one breaks), as well as one in the dressing room.

That done, I run to my banking society where I make a withdrawal which I take to my bank three blocks away and deposit it there so that I can keep just ahead of the cheques I have written. Both the staff at the banking society and the bank are familiar with that pattern!

I've also got to buy some shoes. Shoes and books are my main extravagances. I often buy Charles Jourdan — he makes the best shoes, and today I am going to buy some really expensive ones, gold too with very high heels. They are to wear to tonight's party.

But it's back to rehearsal again. This

afternoon we are going over the songs with the pianist for about half an hour, followed by some time with the dance director. Then we will do a full run through. That done, we have notes from the director, Philip Cassell, for twenty minutes or so, followed by a wardrobe fitting, which I hate. It just means more dressing and undressing, and getting pins stuck into me!

During tea-break I ring my son who has gone to my mother's house after school. I check that he has had a glass of milk and that he has started his homework.

Back to the flat at last, I put on some classical music, maybe Mozart, feed my son, do ten minutes deep relaxation using a technique I learnt several years ago from a yoga teacher.

I have to eat my own dinner at least two hours before the show starts at 8.00pm, which is pretty early, but if I don't I feel terrible. I drink endless cups of ordinary tea — I've probably had a dozen by now, which wouldn't matter so much if I didn't take so much sugar. At least I don't smoke. Next I have a shower and wash my hair again. While it dries I return a few urgent phone calls — this time the *Woman's Day* wants to interview me about the show.

At 7.00pm I arrive at the theatre, my best dress over my arm and carrying my Gucci makeup bag — which is a great shape and looks very pretty. I run up the stairs, rather than take the lift. I have running into members of the audience at the stage. I sign on, walk downstairs and say hello to the stage manager, see my dresser who is always putting clothes out on both sides of the stage and delivering clean laundry to the dressing room.

I clean my teeth, wash my hands, take off my jewellery and then put on the jewellery I wear in the show. Then I sit down in my dressing room. It's the best moment of the day — when the job starts. I start making up, and put on my wig, which takes ages. I've got so much hair each strand has to be separately pinned.

The dresser comes in at 7.45pm. I take everything off and put my lights on first. Then radio-mike. Then hair. Then first costume. All the other costumes would be already set up on either side of the stage since I don't get back to the dressing room at all.

I work right through interval, redoing my face, changing my wig. By this stage the radio-mike is coming



on track and it has to be taped on again. After the show I climb into my boss Jill Fitz's messy dress and leave for the party in a private room in a club with our investors.

I caught road for two hours when I get home, but after a "typical" day like this one I'd probably sleep fairly well.

Is that everyone's idea of what a star does? TM she giggles.

John Waters and Jacki Weaver on set in *They're Playing Our Song*



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spotlight

Actor/director BRUCE MYLES talks about his career and the role of Mozart in MTC's *Amadeus* with **SIMON HUGHES**.

For a man who is about to tackle the rich eccentricities of Mozart in Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*, Bruce Myles looks oddly unassuming and quietly Australian in the leunge of his renovated Hawthorn weatherboard. But talking to him about his twenty-odd years in theatre you are immediately impressed by the man's depth of experience and gentle passion for his art.

A Sydney native, Bruce Myles started out in the fifties as a radio actor in the soapies. Stage work eventually came through groups like the Trust Players who presented a season of Australian plays before Bruce left for New York and London. What he calls a training and study period lasted for ten years and reached some sort of apogee when he played Hamlet at the Salisbury Playhouse. So why does an actor who has heard the call from Mecca decide to return to Australia?

"In the early seventies" he says, "I became really interested in what was happening back here. I was very attracted to what was going on here politically, socially and theatrically. I felt it would be very silly not getting home and being a part of it." And so in 1973 Myles found himself performing in such seminal plays as *Stork*, *Jugglers Three* and *Last of the Knucklemen*.

"The interesting thing was that for an Australian actor I earned a considerable amount of money and everything I did was Australian material." In fact, despite his classical expertise and experience, Bruce's abiding interest was always in the new local writing. And considering the nature and extent of his training as an actor there could well have been anomalies in his situation. "It was very difficult for an actor of my generation to get a grounding in Australian material. You were always having to suck on your Yank or Pom cap and so it was hard to match a European background with the rawness of Australian

TWO DECADES OF EXPERIENCE



Bruce Myles (Barnes) and Sandy Goss (Papi) in the MTC's *Amadeus* of the Seventies.

Bruce Myles. Photo David Parker

writing. But that was very good for me."

Although the technical facility of English actors usually far surpasses their Australian counterparts, Bruce hastens to add that Howard Brenon and Steve Berkoff, two playwrights he has worked with and knows well, are attracted to the Australian American scene because it is much more passionate than the English. If that is so how does the "safe, middle-class suburban audience" (my words) of MTC compare with the excitement of Off-off Broadway or Berkoff?

"I guess I've had a terrific range of work to do for a new director and always the plays have been things I've particularly wanted to have a go at. Either to do with the themes of the piece in terms of looking at our society or just as an exercise in exploring new theatre skills. So I haven't found that particular dilemma . . . it's got to be all seen in the context that I'm a new boy as a director. It's a very new skill I'm learning." Indeed, in the last three years Bruce has directed no less than fifteen plays ranging from Fassbinder to Chekhov, Brecht to Cuckley, and



Bruce Myles (Barnes) and Sandy Goss (Barnes) in the MTC's *Amadeus*.

ES OF CE



Bruce Myles (runner) in the MTC's *Other Faces*

performed in three quite diverse spaces. "How many directors get an opportunity to learn their business like that?"

It is not with regret, however, that Bruce Myles as Mozart once more treads the boards at MTC. Rather he relishes the chance to concentrate on his role and nothing else after his long bout as director. And how does an actor prepare to play the part of an extraordinary artist who dashed off his first symphony at age eleven? We recall the rigorous preparation for *Richard III* and Bruce insists that he will again be donning the tracksuit for *Amadeus*. An actor works to a particular pitch and if that actor happens to be Bruce Myles then he needs to be fit to perform well. He is also amazingly frank about the reception an actor might anticipate:

"When you take on a big piece you're sort of going to blow it anyway. Somebody's going to say, now why did you do it like that? If you're really trying for something you can come a bloody great cropper but you can always back yourself up with technique — to support what ideas you've got."

While MTC are staging one of the big successes of the London season, Myles makes no bones about his opinion of playwright Peter Shaffer. People might recall the slick production of MTC's *Agora* several years ago but many rather thought it a shallow play beneath its sensational theatrical skin. Bruce is inclined to

agree saying that Shaffer is a "sometimes too clever in that he doesn't allow the audience to feel greatly for the character, there are not the dimensions of a Chekhovian portrait, for instance." But he adds wryly that Shaffer would probably defend himself, protesting his only intention is to present "a bloody good night in the theatre."

From all reports of its premiere season, that is exactly what *Amadeus* promises to be. If nothing else, Shaffer is a brilliant tailor who sets up the last night of Mozart's life as seen through the eyes of a rival. His passionate hatred for the composer makes this one of the most grotesque portraits imaginable. The play's time sequence is beautifully structured and Bruce Myles seems itching to take on the "unconventional, arrogant, crude and totally unpredictable genius of Mozart." Apart from brushing up his French and Italian which Mozart spoke impeccably ("And I don't," admits Bruce) he is enduring the dubious pleasures of daily five-finger exercises on the piano. Hopefully, he won't suffer the trauma Dirk Bogarde experienced in his portrayal of Lucien.

The energy and enthusiasm Bruce Myles brings to a part are infectious, for you feel that even if he did "come a bloody great cropper" as he puts it, he would still come out of it with his artistic integrity intact. Whenever the outcome you may be sure that like the man himself Bruce Myles' Mozart will have great character and sensitivity.

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spotlight

PLAYING OUR SHOW — Mason Miller Productions

by Donna Sadia

There is a perverse irony in the fact that a young WA company, Mason Miller Productions, for whom theatre production is a passionate hobby rather than a source of income, have to date succeeded in an area where many a desperate investor has bitten the dust.

Bill Mason, wearing a beard which makes him look older than his 24 years, is the front man of the company. After university he spent two years as tours manager with the WA Arts Council learning a lot about putting the right shows in the right places, and one year doing freelance promotion before taking his present post as manager of the Hoik-In-The-Wall this year.

His partner, Rory Miller has his own city business in the technical side of theatre (Stagecraft) and as far as Mason Miller is concerned prefers to stay in the background.

Neither displays either the flamboyance or the ambitious push usually associated with professional entrepreneurs. Their company is not listed in the phone book yet, they don't have an office let alone a secretary, but under the double M banner they have presented three popular, and by all accounts successful, shows in the first six months of this year: *Charlie's Aunt*, *The Importance of Being*

Earnest, and *Cowards Conundrum*, all directed by Ray Omodei with Jake Newby as business and production manager.

Bill Mason says he now realises the risks they took when they mounted *Charlie's Aunt*, but they learn a lot about what not to do next time. Their concept of the company was ongoing but, as he says, when you haven't got a lot of money behind you you don't make great plans. Which seems to be their modus operandi: moving one show at a time, getting the profits into the next one, and holding their own.

"So far," says Miller, "We've not made a fortune but we've put people in work, paid the bills and done shows that audiences wanted to see."

Decisions are made very informally; they are essentially a pragmatic group not prepared to go out on a limb for some wild artistic dream nor to present "junk theatre" for a fast take-off.

Mason stresses the crucial importance of casting and they are proud of the fact that they have not resorted to imports for box-office bait, but use all West Australian casts. Omodei used a comparative unknown, Jim Bean, in *Charlie's Aunt* and *Earnest* after which the young actor was snapped up by the Playhouse and is now booked up till February 1982. In *Conundrum* the director had the wit to use tiny opera singer Terri Johnson in her first straight role and audiences were charmed to discover a beguiling singer who could act and look good into the bargain.

Advertising is another priority and by local standards Mason Miller do it big, on buses and hoardings as well as the usual outlets of TV, newspapers and handbills.

But obviously choice of material is their most important strength and because they have no continuing overheads they are in the happy position of not having to stage a show they don't believe in just to keep going. They have cancelled a theatre booking for September because they couldn't find exactly the right venue and the people they wanted are not available, but Mason says they will keep their eyes open till the right script turns up.

"Always one dreams of having a really smash hit," he admits, "but in the meantime there is a great charge to be had out of sitting in a theatre on opening night and thinking 'This is our show... we've done it!'"

Bill Mason

Joanne Le Net (Wife in *Charlie's Aunt*)



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ROCKY'S RESPECTABLE

KEN HORLER
discusses the Rocky
Horror Show revival with
WILTON MORLEY.

If *Har* can sow them in the Leagues Clubs more than a decade after the event, why shouldn't *Rocky* move across town from Glebe to the Theatre Royal a mere seven years later. This was the view of the London agents when they granted the rights to the Australian revival to Wilton Morley. "No Glebe scheme please", said the London money, "we want it in a real theatre". The original team, Harry M Miller (producer), Jim Sharman (director) and Brian Thompson (designer) might have flinched right away at such entrepreneurial caution, but they were the conditions which Morley was happy to accept.

It wasn't as if Morley was hot in the pursuit of the *Rocky* revival rights. He says that by happen chance he was asked to vet the Oz applicants in London and thought "Why not me!" The original teams had just finished the sequel to the *Rocky* film *Shock Treatment*, to be released in Australia in December, and only Brian Thompson, the designer, wanted to work on the revival.

So, against strong antipodean competition, Wilton Morley secured the rights and attempted to flag off shares in the venture. "A dismal failure," he says, "I didn't have the patience." Morley then went to his old pals who were happy to take a share of the action. Wilton took 45% for himself, J C Williamson took 30% and Phillip Emmanuel, a London chemist who came here with Berkoff's *Ems*, took up the remaining 25%.

The pre-production costs are

estimated to be \$300,000 and the weekly running costs \$60,000. Earlier Morley productions had included *Same Time Next Year*, *Over A Candle*, *The Old Country*, *The Dresser*, and *The Education of Benjamin Franklin* (with Nimrod). Of these shows, only one was Australian.

Morley had earlier professed a commitment to Australian writers, directors and actors and was aware of this dilemma when he came to cast the show with Brian Thompson. He says that his choice of Japanese-American choreographer-director David Toguri came only after three Australian directors had turned him down. Rodney Fisher wasn't available. Neil Armfield felt suspenders and fish net stockings weren't his bag and Terry O'Connell was busy in Queensland.

So his choice was the man who had already directed it successfully in Queensland, Los Angeles, Japan and Oslo and who had been the choreographer on *Har* and *Superior*. Besides, London was insisting on director approval and the Australian money can't have been unhappy.

For reasons of economics the show had to be cast and Equity squared off before the imported director arrived. Approval for the use of an imported director had been given to the Department of Immigration by Damien Stapleton of the Australian Theatrical Amusement Employees Association, which was odd since directors cannot be members of that union.

The director arrived three days before rehearsal began to find most of the show already cast. In the final selection Morley relied heavily on Brian Thompson. Two or three parts remained to be confirmed and the argument with Equity over the employment of Perry Madden (UK as Riff



Annemarie Breun as play Janet



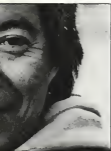
David Toguri — David's Father



David Toguri, director of *The Rocky Horror Show*



Kerry Myers, to play Magenta



Jay Hackitt, to play Rocky



Bruce Thompson, designer of The Rocky Horror Show

Raff) had to be resolved. Hedden had played the part successfully in London for two years but unlike Daniel Abiner (Frank 'n' Porter) had not acquired an Australian wife to make it sweet with Equity.

In the result, the casting can be seen as commercial-cynical: the employment of new, young, beautiful people plus a mix of "names". Antonette Byron who plays Janet has been in *The Renfrew Years*; Jay Hackitt who is Rocky, played a surfer in the movie *Forever Blue*; Steve J Spence doubles Eddie and Dr Scott; Kerry Myers who plays Magenta has been a model and done bits on TV. The narrator will be played by Stuart Wagstaff, and by Molly Meldrum from ABC's *Countdown* in Melbourne.

I asked Wilton Mackay about the use of imported actors and he reminded him of his earlier protestation "the best thing that could happen would be a ban on overseas actors" (*TA* June 1977) "I've changed my mind," he said engagingly. "After all, Dan Abiner is the best Frank 'n' Porter since Tim Curry. He'll be different from Reg Lestrime. More heterosexual."

"My target audience is the 13-30 age group, but I hope it will reach a wider audience."

"The time has come for us to be seriously Australian" (*TA* June 77) — so I put to him the promotion of Australian shows. "I'm a bit busy. I don't get to see everything I should. I talk to Bruce Pollock of *Nimrod* and Paul Hes of the *STC* of SA about their shows."

The cult movie of *Rocky* must rub off on the revival of the stage show I suggested. "Not necessarily, it may be the same three hundred who go to see it every Friday and Saturday night. I can't count on them. Sure, my target audience is the 13-30 age group, but I hope it will reach a wider audience. Yes, we'll have the usual merchandising and hope to turn out a four track EP with Festival."

Seen at a theatre near your place the *Rocky Horror Revival*

HUSTLING FOR THE INNOVATIVE

CARRILLO GANTNER, Executive Director of the Playbox Theatre Company, talks to **KATE LEGGE**.

Hours and hours of work went into the facts, figures and forecasts set out in a 24 page "Submission for Government Assistance", the hefty document which will determine the future of Melbourne's Playbox Theatre Company.

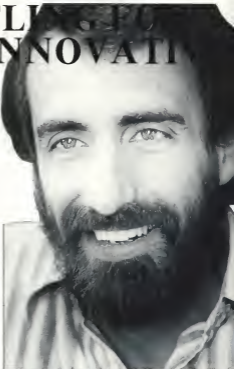
1980 was a bad financial year for the company. Although expenditure was contained at budgeted levels, the Downstairs theatre failed to produce a box office hit and a six figure deficit was incurred.

Part of the problem lies with the size and status of two theatre spaces which prejudice the company's chances of commercial success. In the tiny Upstairs theatre, even a sell-out, one-man show can not recover costs.

The Downstairs theatre has an audience capacity of 100 and a stage which restricts the range and style of productions. "We are constantly battling against the limitations of a small pocket producers," said Carrillo Gantner, the company's Executive Director.

This situation is further aggravated by an artistic policy which is committed to presenting contemporary theatre. "While we want to survive we do not propose to choose plays cynically, on the basis of box office success," Mr Gantner said.

While the Playbox waits for next year's funding figures to be announced, a mood of pragmatism has settled over the administration, as



*Carrillo Gantner, Executive Director,
Playbox Theatre Company*



Peter Gammara and David Cameron in *True West*.



Bille Warranberg and Rebeka Canning in *The Golden Goldenbergs*.

staff consider their fate. Whatever happens, no one is prepared to compromise artistic standards.

Next year's proposed programme reflects the Company's commitment to contemporary drama. In the first half of the year, the Company wants to stage a trilogy of plays by American playwrights Sam Shepard. To balance the American bias, a trilogy of plays by Louis Nowra, will be performed later in the year. This choice conforms with the company's original objective to present the work of non-naturalistic writers. If the commercial potential of these productions seems dubious, the need for more accessible theatre has not been ignored.

A new play by Melbourne playwright Therese Riddle, called *A Whip Round for Percy Grainger*, is merely timed to coincide with the year set aside to commemorate the life and music of this composer. And negotiations are underway to tear a production of *The Fall of the House of Usher* by Steven Berkoff and the London Theatre Group. In Melbourne, it would be staged at the National Theatre in St Kilda, to cater for a larger audience and boost box office revenue.

This kind of play — the "loss leader", which helps to sell other plays scheduled in the same season has already worked for the Playbox. It is part of a strategy which Gantner calls, "learning to combine lofty ideals with pragmatic realities". In the struggle to survive, the company has been sharpening its wits and competing with other powerful arts organisations for private and corporate sponsorship.

More than \$30,000 has been raised this year for specific projects, carefully tailored to suit the company's resources. It is not the first time that the Playbox has beaten the Melbourne Theatre Company at the funding game. However, its success in the market for government funds is notorious.

"Big companies can always cut back, drop a venue, or go more commercial and still keep a very high

"A company like the Playbox is stretched to the bone . . . if you cut back on the product there is no longer any justification for its existence."

profile. Very small companies manage to survive on their wit and energy, if they haven't got many assets to service. But a company like the Playbox, is stretched to the bone already. If you cut back the product there is no longer any justification for its existence."

Signs of a strong comeback after last year's outstanding financial deficit and the recent appointment of Rex Cramphorn as Resident Director signify a turning point in the company's history, but it will be difficult to take any more steps forward without adequate funds.

A document awarded to the 1982 submission, raises the possibility of forming a "developmental stream" of eight actors who would work partly in isolation, but could also be involved in the mainstream productions for both the Upstairs and Downstairs theatres. The concept was initiated by Mr Cramphorn and draws on his experience with the Performance Syndicate, and last year's "Invited list" Shakespeare project.

Although such a project would be expensive, Mr Gantner believes the ensemble of actors will produce a "creative buzz" that might be reflected in box office sales. "It would also be another step towards assembling a permanent company."

"The funding bodies applauded Rex's appointment, so it would be a great pity if they decide not to support this idea," Mr Gantner said. It also promises a solution to the problem of finding a stronger image for a company which has sometimes been accused of being random and eclectic in its programming.

Mr Gantner admits that the Playbox product has been diverse: "Some companies are based around the magnetic energy and ideas of one director, whose path they follow unflinchingly. I have worked more as a gatherer of various talents, by trying to create opportunities for other people to use our resources."

"I have tried to make brave choices, some would call them stupid, in search of theatre with more edge." This

attitude has, perhaps, been more successfully demonstrated in the range of initiatives the Playbox has taken elsewhere.

Some of these include the development of work opportunities for Australian artists through the international exchange of a director or actor with an American company in Seattle, the initiation of a live theatre laboratory for all performing arts companies, in *The Age* and *The Herald*; and the organisation of exchange tours of interstate productions with the Nimrod and the South Australian Theatre Company.

"Melbourne theatre is undergoing terrific change, not only because of a lack of money, but because of a change in tastes. The opening of the Arts Centre will have a profound effect on all that we do. Just looking at the experience of Sydney and Adelaide, indicates that the building itself will interest audiences — for a couple of years at least. I think it's important that we should be part of that."

Mr Gantner hopes the Playbox will be one of many companies able to take advantage of the Arts Centre's facilities for drama. "Ultimately the Victorian Arts Centre Trust should package seasons which offer the best of all our work, so that audiences can become familiar with a range of theatre."

"But in the short term, I think the move will have a harmful effect on the small companies. The big companies are arguing that they will need all the money to get themselves established there. That is a very powerful argument for the government, which will have spent \$360 million on the Centre. There ought to be positive discrimination in favour of the companies which are not based there. Audience attention will be focused on the Centre anyway, with all the PR for the opening."

Mr Gantner is sure the Ministry has heard this argument loud and clear, but the Playbox is not taking any chances. While their outlook is far from secure, the company will keep its head down and continue to hustle in a climate of uncertainty.

"I have tried to make brave choices, some would call them stupid, in search of theatre with more edge."

THE FAIRFIELD PLAYERS IN FRONT "SMALL REVENUES"

A Fair Play written by the Fairfield Players for the 1982 Festival of Fairfield. The Play is the result of a Writing Workshop held here last year. A visit the building of the Fairfield Arms but the Play could be easily adapted to 20 most communities.

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Crossing the Tasman

In August this year, as part of a Tasman Exchange Programme, a delegation from Australia visited Auckland, Wellington, Palmerston North, Dunedin and Christchurch on a fact-finding tour.

They were MICHAEL FITZGERALD, ALAN EDWARDS, BRUCE MYLES, WENDY BLACKLOCK, PHILIP PARSONS (Convener), BRIAN ADAMS, KATHARINE BRISBANE and GERRY LAWRENSEN. All made contributions to the following report by KATHARINE BRISBANE.

The first shock of recognition comes with the JCW monogram emblazoned over the postmodern arch of the blue and gold tin Mappin's Theatre in Auckland. Too many poets support the gallery for today's audience and the place is an earthquake hazard. It will probably come down under new legislation.

What must surely have been the most beautiful of all the Firm's houses, the Theatre Royal in Christchurch, was saved by public subscription hours before the bulldozers moved in to make it a car park (as happened with Adelaide's Theatre Royal in the 60s). Newhere in Australia is one so sharply aware of the lost empire when Australia and New Zealand were joined in one great theatre economy.

The days of the great tours are long gone. For the most part all productions like the current *Old Culture's* much altered, have these theatres now.

When JCW sent their advertisement to the National Playwrights' Conference forum a few years ago in a last desperate appeal to keep the old chain alive, he found indifference. A new, local theatre was burgeoning. The Firm's imported work seemed wholly irrelevant and we let it die. But at a certain price. The disappearance of the chains made the national exploitation of commercial success intolerably difficult. Again our theatre was a cottage industry. Productions seldom travelled interstate and across the Tasman practically never.

But with the 80s, movement within Australia is growing, and a promise to cross the Tasman shift-growth in the Court Theatre's production from Christchurch of



Alex Fox, Dan, Robert Jenks
in the Mercury Theatre's *Barbarians in Auckland*

Blood of the Lamb, by NZ's parliament of playwrights, Bruce Mason (see next).

Wendy Blacklock, co-ordinator for the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, is managing the tour here. As one of the delegates she was impressed by the theatre spaces available to an enterprising entrepreneur, particularly in the small-scale circuit, and by the encouragement given by such organisations as the Students' Arts Council.

Touring well, of course, never again be what it was in the days of the Firm, Pullers and the Troiki concert — but what is of interest today is the fact that they thought in terms of a total industry.

Within Australia we still need to make more of what we have. But at the same time conference costs money and the larger the market the greater the chance of excellence. For the playwright as well as the performer in NZ a potential audience of three million could be expanded by mutual agreement to another 14 million. And vice versa. The NZ playwright has a strong voice now. A larger market could affirm and increase the status of the profession in both countries by the exchange of training, practice and excellence.

These were the motives behind the establishment of a Tasman Exchange Program, which brought three NZ delegates to Australia on a fact-finding tour to NZ.

The tour was intensive, incorporating subsidised theatres, drama schools, TIE units, Arts Council personnel, commercial houses, and building projects such as the restoration of the Old Customs House in Auckland by an enterprising American developer to be a theatre and community centre, and in Christchurch the arts centre converted from Gothic stone university buildings. It was a crucial time for drama — the Springbok rugby tour had brought New Zealanders into the streets as never before, with a passion which helped us to understand something of the country, its history and aspirations.

On the last day a meeting in Auckland studied the establishment of a Tasman Theatre Foundation in Sydney, and in NZ the Association of Community Theatres was appointed the responsible body. Their task will be to facilitate exchange projects proposed by theatre practitioners. The first move in 1982 will be a working visit by two people from each country to the other.

So far the scheme has been financed with funds from the Australia-New Zealand

Foundation, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, the Australia Council, and help from Qantas and Air New Zealand. The latter has undertaken to provide a fare annually. Further funding will be sought from private sources through the AITT to provide travelling fellowships.

On a practical level the delegates found much that could be of mutual benefit. At the top of the profession they found recognition at the smallness of the industry, and among the young a need of wider training. For Australians the NZ theatres offer a need for new faces and skills and the chance to experiment in a variety of work over a short space of time. As Bruce Mylre said of actors: "A director was saying he had to go to England to find a Willy Loman. My first question was 'Why didn't you think of Australia?' An Australian actor would be out there before you could put the phone down."

There were already a great many NZ actors working in Australia, he said, and initially there could be assistance to immigrants on both sides. But not if the exchange were truly a two-way one.

The group was dismayed by the apparent poor status of the NZ artist in decision-making and the low rates of pay, the fact that up to 80% of theatre income was derived from the box office, and by the unresolvable problems that faced the Federal funding body, the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council. They felt that moral support to artists by the profession here, and advice in the administrative and marketing areas could be of assistance in raising the confidence of theatre practitioners.

In contrast Bruce Adams, who worked with a NZBC camera team, said he was impressed by the obvious film experience of the actors with whom he worked and the skill, efficiency and economy of the technicians — a reflection of the sophistication of the NZ film industry, from which actors derive their best income.

On the question of what NZ could offer the Australian artist, Michael Fitzgerald said: "Firstly theatre-in-education is NZ's developing and talented people are working in the area. In both countries there is a great deal of rethinking and reshaping going on, in company with the development of an indigenous theatre."

He was impressed, as Alan Edwards was, by the theatre restaurant system which helped funds for theatres as small communities like Palmerston North. Centropoint Theatre's program is far from



Cliff Wood and Alan Edwards in the Centropoint Theatre's small-scale *Warmings* in Palmerston North.

the music hall format. Its 1988 program of eleven plays ranged from *Ilse* to *Ayckbourn* and included two NZ plays and such unlikely choices as *Rudolf's Adieu*. We saw the most credible *Small Craft Warnings*, by Tennessee Williams.

Beyond an obvious benefit for younger theatre artists, especially designers, being involved in an exchange, there are many opportunities to experiment and develop for technicians, craftsmen and administrators. The NZ companies perform at least 10 plays a year, their eclectic repertoires include the classical and provocative, their venues range from the traditional proscenium to unusual alternative spaces.

Their companies also operate on the basis of a number of artists contracted for a year at a time.

"Most, particularly NZ, opens up the possibility of an exchange of senior artists, especially directors, who could find stimulation from the challenge of both working

and teaching at, say the Court or Theatre Corporation."

The delegation left NZ with a feeling of admiration for the hard work and hardworking of small resources which they felt was a lesson to the Australian theatre. And some of them will certainly return to work for a time when the opportunity occurs. Spontaneous plans were also made. It may be that Bruce Mylre's MTC production of Ron Elphick's *Domino* will visit NZ, and that the much-shattering production from the Mercury, Auckland, of Bruce Kettle's *Barbarians*, will come to Australia. Meanwhile we have *Blood of the Lamb* for a start.

It is the Theatre Theatre Foundation's hope that further exchanges will be facilitated from a perceived need and growing friendships: that another kind of social industry will assert itself, born on a different basis from that of the old gift and gingerbread PCW days.



Elisebeth Moody and Josh Douglas in Christchurch Coast Theatre's *Blood of the Lamb*.

Gordon Chater has described *Blood of the Lamb* as "the most exciting play I have read since *The Education of Benjamin Franklin*." *Blood of the Lamb* was written by Bruce Mason, one of NZ's foremost writers. His play explores its controversial topic with a dialogue which, Chater says, "bubbles with quick, malice wit and is constantly dotted with puns and wordplay."

It is a remarkable play about two women who live for 20 years as man and wife, and will show the work of one of NZ's finest actresses, Elisebeth Moody. It will play in Sydney and Newcastle.

That was the season that was

by Karl Lavett

As the new season begins to stir, a quick look back at the 1980-81 season before it disappears into the theatrical mists

The Video Factor

The rift between Broadway and Off-Broadway grew wider this season as Broadway clearly defined itself as a home for musical entertainments. Only a couple of dramas, the imported *Amadeus* and the home-grown *The Fifth of July*, survived this musical flood. Even comedy, long a staple of Broadway, seemed to be asphyxiated in the musical tide.

This does not mean, however, that this was a golden year for the American musical. Second-class musicals competed with musical revues and the fact that a slush of a show, *Forty Second Street*, could win the Tony summed up the problem.

That all this mediocrity proved incredibly popular and that Broadway sent a bumper season profits to the bank of the money — Television: its secret influence is that no show can open and run without a blitzing of television commercials (the Truth in Advertising ruling, incidentally, doesn't seem to apply here — on the *Elvis* commercial there was Patrick O'neill when I knew she was stamping her feet in Sydney). These commercials have succeeded in locating a huge new audience, unused to the theatre but willing to be part of it.

The indirect influence of television is an audience whose concentration span is limited and who seek spectacular but conventional material. This is an audience that only goes to the theatre one, two or three times a year. Reviewed, in *review* of *The Powers of Persuasion* saying that "if you see only one show this year, this is the show to see" tells you which way the wind is blowing. This phenomenon, plus Broadway's prohibitive price structure, has made many regular New York theatregoers flee to premier and more creative fields of Off and Off-Off Broadway with only occasional forays back to the Broadway fold.

Company Roll Call

Much of the strength of New York theatre lies in its Off-Broadway theatre companies. Their variety and individual characters provide the spice for the



North River.



David C. Taylor of The North River.

Manhattan theatrical menu. The most noteworthy feature on the company line-up was the demise of the BAM company after only its second season. Began under the hand of David Jones of the RSC, its first season attempt at a classical repertoire promised great things. Then suddenly this season we returned to find half the actors gone and their replacements nowhere near the demands of a classical repertoire. What went wrong? Why did the actors flee? A sad tale that doesn't sugar well. Joseph Papp's Public Theatre also had a troubling season, but knowing Mr Papp's sure to rise and run again.

Offart, however, flourished. The Circle Repertory, assisted by its vibrant playwright, Lanford Wilson, contributed *A Tale Told* and *The Desires*, the Phoenix had one of its best seasons and gave us *Desired Therapy* and *Merrilee*. Manhattan Theatre Club garnered the Pulitzer Prize with *Cover of the Heart*, the WPA introduced a first-time playwright Kevin Wade and Ar. Exchange Playwrights Harlowes had two successes in *Coming Attractions* and *The March of the Fabulous*, the Roundabout carved out a handy niche for itself as a revival house of principally English plays with an imported English star.

No Time For Comedy

Read into this what you will, but only one Broadway comedy, Joan Kerr's *Lunch Hour* achieved any run at all this season — and even *Lunch Hour* limped along half-heartedly. The casualties included Neil Simon with *Fools*, Steve Tesel's *Divorce Suits* was the most interesting failure — an attempt at American farce that almost succeeded.

Stars of Stage and Screen

A heartening trend has emerged this season. An increasing number of stars that have become internationally known on the silver or television screen are not forsaking their theatrical roots — instead they have become home-ward-looking angels set alight to try their wings once more on New York stages. Unlike such performers as Angela Lansbury and Lauren Bacall who came back to the theatre after they believed their film careers were over, this is a new breed who will race theatre, film and television concurrently.

This past season we've seen Al Pacino in *Amadeus* *Death*, Meryl Streep in *Alive*, Christopher Reeve and Richard Thomas in *The Fifth of July*, Sigourney Weaver in

Beyond Therapy and William Hurt in *Child's Game*. These performers with their wider fame and personal followings bring box office clout and can measurably assist a playwright or performing group. Although *The Fifth of July* is the best American play of the year, its success on Broadway is probably due entirely to the drawing power of Christopher Reeve, and then Richard Thomas who replaced him. The latest actor to join this new breed is Kevin Kline who after wonderful work in *On The Town*, *Swing Shift*, *Look Back* and *The Piano of Penelope* is about to make a big splash on the screen in *Sophie's Choice*. Kevin Kline indeed could be the definitive actor for the eighties — sensitivity, a sense of reality plus a touch of footballer's swagger.

The Bigger They Are...

The game of Get the Famous Playwright continued to be played by leading critics. Edward Albee deserved all he got for trying to reduce *Lookin'* to a pulp paperback, but Arthur Miller with *The American Clock* demanded kinder treatment. The play's strengths were greater than its faults and with gentler handling might have lived through sufficient re-writing to emerge as a worthy play.

A Bench of Beauties

Laurel Wolfson, for her Talley Trilogy, began with *Talley's Folly* and *The Fifth of July* and this season's *A Tale Told* for being a combination of William Inge and George S. Kaufman and the most substantial American playwright currently writing.

Roberta Maxwell, for her performance in the title part of *Mari Suarti*, a lesson in stage concentration.

John Lone, Director of, and Actor in *The Dance And The Redhead*, versatility matched with great style.

Harris Yulin, for his touching performance in *A Lesson From Alice*.

John Lee Beatty, for his showing in where the Tallies live, after the Beat house in *Talley's Folly* and the wide, white, verandah in *The Fifth of July*, transforming the tiny Cuckoo stage into the Talley parlour complete with staircase, imaginative, evocative creations all.

Michelle Shay, for her performance as the heroic villainess in *Meetings*.

Eva La Gallienne, for her charm and her performance in *To Grandmother's House We Go*, a class act in a not very classy season.



Michael Jeter, Daniel Mann, and Frances Fitzgerald in the N.Y. film *Marvin at Midnight*. Photo: Laurence Brown.

UK Directors' classics

by Irving Wardle

Upon assuming command of the National Theatre eight years ago, Peter

Hall declared a new policy towards classical dramatists namely that they should be treated with the same respect as the classical composers, and not cut about, rearranged, and generally mishandled as he and his RSC colleagues had been in the habit of doing in the service of topical relevance. At the time this sounded



dangerously close to the discredited doctrine of "copying Shakespeare's intentions" (whatever those may have been), and since then it has been interesting to watch the NT striving to put it into practice.

No NT director has come closer to doing so than Peter Gill who built up a great reputation for austere textual illumination at the Riverside Studios before joining Hall's team last year and commencing the good work with acclaimed productions of *Turgenev* and *Molière*. In *Much Ado About Nothing* (Oleac), his first Shakespearean essay in this address, the approach is beginning to show signs of going stale.

It goes without saying in a Gill production that costumes will be in period, sets reduced to the barest simplicity, and the text left to do its work without being propped up by a directorial concept. In this case, his regular designer Alison Cherry has supplied a group of lovely walls, which in one act panned on the other, backed by a quartet of revolving panels, so allowing dynamic rural and urban perspectives. The visual gesture of the show, therefore, is to cram Leonato's vast estate (where he contains the whole of Don Pedro's army) into the modest property of a Warwickshire gentleman.

The general atmosphere of the production is extremely winning. The company seem less to be trying themselves up to a performance than sharing a work they love with the audience. And so far as the central partnership of Michael Gambon's Benedick and Penelope Wilton's Beatrice goes, there will be no complaints from me. All the fun is there, and a good deal less spite than usual, and the undoubted intimacy of the *Kiln Cloister* scene goes a long way to justifying all the sacrifices that have led up to it. However, there are plenty of caveats. Some conceptual approach is vital to this play if the denunciation of Hero is not to spill out and contaminate the surrounding comedy, and the blank-faced readings of Leonato, Don Pedro, and Claudio himself emphatically prove that this text cannot simply be left to look after itself. There are related moments of marvellous invention, as in the ever-dropping wine with the sipping Benedick pursuing Don Pedro's party as if attached to them with a piece of string. Mr Gill drops in effects like that as if to show that he knows all about "director's theatre" and has discarded it as a childish game. But, at least in this show, he has not found anything to put in its place.

As the NT's Cottesloe studio there is another case study from the alien's queue in the form of Celderen's *The Master of Zalamea*. The director is Michael Bogdanov, on past showing a hell-raising exponent of director's theatre to whom it was an article of faith that the first move with any classic is to put it into modern dress. Not so on this occasion. Clothes, music, environment are all of the Spanish Golden Age, and the effect is to reveal the piece as a blazing masterpiece marred only by the intrusive modernisms of Adrian Mitchell's translation.

Based on a sketch of the 1580 campaign against Portugal, the play tells the story of a captain, don Alvaro, who is killed on a wealthy peasant, Crespo, as his regiment is passing through Zalamea. Alvaro captures his host's daughter expecting to earn some minor military punishment. Unluckily for him, the wronged father mislaid master of the town and settles the business for good in his own court. The subtitle is "The Best Carrotting Ever Done".

In other words, Celderen is extending the peasant house code to include ghastliness of the lower rank, and the social paradoxes this engenders are memorably epitomised in the marvellous partnership of Daniel Massey's unscrupulous peasant Alvaro and Michael Bryant's Crespo — a performance simultaneously conveying his sense of personal worth and social baseness. In the crucial scene, he prostitutes himself before his noble captive, offering all his goods and his freedom in exchange for an honourable marriage, then slowly rises to his feet and dispatches his daughter to a convent and the camera pans Alvaro to the garrets.

Two footnotes from the Edinburgh Festival along the same lines: a Birmingham Rep Theatre *As You Like It*, updated to the world of Maria Antonova pastoral, with the result that the country runaways seem merely going down to the bottom of the garden rather than returning to nature, and a version of Racine's *Indrageneus* by the Theatre de la Salomonides not only set in the Palace of Versailles, but in the Versailles of today — with off-white pastiche and an informative placard in the main foyer. I cannot set much political conviction between Racine's examination of the birth of an absolute tyranny and the rest of Girard, but the spectacle of a supposedly modern tragedy played in an actual museum of the same epoch generates extremely potent theatrical discharge.

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE INTERNATIONAL THEATRE INSTITUTE

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Director: Martin Thornburgh
Secretary: Alison Lyssa

BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL LIAISON OF THEATRE SCHOOLS

The Bureau at Liege, Belgium, was created by the International Theatre Institute for exchanging information and material about theatre education. The Bureau would be very grateful if theatre schools could send them a copy of their 1990 programme of studies and any documents, brochures or papers on their teaching experiences and methods. In return, the Bureau will provide a catalogue of all documents received, and there will be opportunities for exchange of information and documents between the drama school and the Bureau.

Further info: Australian Centre of the ITI or write with documents or enquiries direct to: René Hauman, Bureau of International Liaison of Theatre Schools, 3 rue Förgen, 4000 LIEGE, Belgium.

CREATIVE THEATRE PROGRAMME, FRANCE

The Theatre Programme in France are seeking applications from people interested in attending a three month intensive seminar studying French theatre from the inside, with the culmination of the experience being their own Paris performances. Some participants will be coming from the USA and Canada, and there would be room for up to 5 participants from Australia to join the group. Tuition fees (\$US2,900), food and lodging and transport costs would have to be met by participants.

2 January to 10 May, 1992

Information and application forms: Australian Centre of the ITI

PLAY SCRIPTS FROM MANY COUNTRIES

The Australian Centre of the ITI has in its library copies of *Agamemnon*, a series of playscripts sent regularly to ITI Centres by the Hungarian Centre. Scripts include from Hungary, Magda Szabó, *An Old Fashioned Story* (translated by James Bohn), from the Netherlands, Gerard Lommens, *Swanville* (translated by Mary Wagnman), and from Australia, Dorothy Hewitt's *Pendennis's Cove*. A list of the scripts is available on request from the Australian Centre.

Impressive economy

UPSIDE DOWN GYPSY

by Janet Hendry

Upside Down at the Bottom of the World by David Allen. Jigaw Theatre Company, Goswami House Theatre Centre, ACT. Opened August 1981. Director: Graham Newman, Designer: Suzanne Humphries. Lighting Operator, Felipe Almeida (Sound Operator, Alan Murray).

Cast: Lawrence: Bob Philippa; Friends: Mag Simpson, Jack, Mark Reidman, Victoria, Sue Gurnsey. (Professional)

Gypsy by Lawrence/Sue Gurnsey. Temple production at Theatre 3, Acton, ACT. Opened August 1, 1981.

Director: Ian Howard, Musical Director: Ron Gustin, Choreography: Jan Carr, Stage Manager: Robert Taylor. (Amateur)

There's a special fascination about shows dealing with the lives of historical personalities. One wonders whether the writer will be able to walk the tightrope between a documentary treatment and an imaginative projection of his characters' inner lives. And can a play about, say, DH Lawrence do any more than dramatise the widely-accepted image of the great novelist's personality?

In the case of David Allen's play, the answer to the second question is, regrettably, no. But having said that, I hasten to add that this is a cleverly crafted play in which, though he says nothing new about Lawrence, the playwright succeeds in synthesising many of the puzzling and apparently conflicting aspects of Lawrence's character into a believable whole. He does it, too, with impressive economy of effort, contriving to say a great deal about Lawrence's life and character in a relatively short and simply constructed piece of theatre.

Upside Down at the Bottom of the World is a suitably brain-teasing puzzle for Lawrence's brief stay in Australia, during which he wrote *Kangaroo* — not so much a novel as a kaleidoscope of impressions, some acute, some wildly inaccurate, all poetic. The play is based on the novel, but Allen wisely ignores the details of Australian politics in 1932 (which Lawrence never really grasped) in favour of the broader theme of universal



*Mag Simpson (Friends) and Bob Philippa (D.H. Lawrence) in *Upside Down at the Bottom of the World*. Photo: Keith Berg*

brotherhood that is characteristic of all Lawrence's work.

The Jigaw Theatre Company, now comfortably ensconced in its new quarters at Goswami House, gave this play the well-considered performance it deserves. Against a starkly effective set, the cottage at Thoresby — Lawrence (Bob Philippa) and Friends (Mag Simpson) acted out the complex emotional drama of their relationship to the mangled awe and contempt of their Australian neighbours Jack (Mark Reidman) and Victoria (Sue Gurnsey).

Mag Simpson's Friends was a powerful performance, perhaps a little too heavily Texanised, but evoking the blend of ambivalence, hauteur and provocative sexuality which so tantalised Lawrence. Sue Gurnsey made the most of the small role of Victoria, all wide blue-eyed innocence with just a hint of precocious sexual awareness in her embryonic relationship with Lawrence.

The men did not quite reach this standard. Bob Philippa's Lawrence intelligently captured the frightening intensity of the character, usually in his portrayal of never-quite-explicit coquetry, but at other times it fell away, so that as the battle of wills and wits with Friends, which should always be in pose, he too often seemed to be losing. Mark Reidman's Jack had the right feeling of Gatsby gaucherie, but there was too much of it, when called upon to say something intelligent, he flunked to second convincing.

Lighting and sound effects, extremely important in the flashback episodes, were totally professional. And it is a tribute to good actor Graeme Brown that the gliding

intelligence behind the production never became obtrusive, allowing the play to stand or fall on its own merits. It stood.

Meanwhile at Theatre Three, Temple was presenting *Gypsy*, the story of the stripper Gypsy Rose Lee. Here the aim is to present a penetrating but light-hearted account of the stripper's rise to stardom, dominated by the inevitably ambivalent stage mother.

Temple's productions are rarely slick or professional, and this was no exception. There were long pauses between scenes when the impetus of the show faltered, and the orchestra was not really up to the demands of this rather difficult score. On the other hand, the company always displays an infectious enthusiasm, which does a lot to make up for awkward moments, and sometimes it throws up a superb individual performance.

This time it was Carol Starkey's Louisa (Gypsy). She caught to perfection the patina of the unloved, unwanted daughter, pushed on to the stage to lead the vanguard of a frustrated Mum, and blossoming suddenly into sexy stardom. The metamorphosis from awkward teenager to glamorous star was beautifully managed, and I am still haunted by her staging of "Little Lamb".

While not up to this level, the rest of the production just got by. The cast, headed by Shirley Thomas as Rose (Mama), really put missed finding the emotional depth that I am sure is there, largely because the production declined to give substance rather than controlled energy. But all praise to Temple for giving Carol Starkey the opportunity to display an amazing new talent.

Oz classic with impact

THE SHIFTING HEART

by Michael Le Moignan

The Shifting Heart by Richard Beynon. Marnie Street Theatre Company at Mollies. Sydney. NSW. Opened September 4, 1991

Director: John Krummel; Design: Richard Anderson; Lighting Designer: Gary Youlton; Stage Manager: Victor Ashfield; Production Manager: Frances Taylor; Cost: Joppy Burch, Peg Gilman, Lyle Fink, Lyle Burch, Lyle Burch, Alan Wilson, Monica Burch, Philippa Baker, Clara Fowler, Kit Taylor; Music Provider: Joanna Lockwood; Sound Proof, Neil Hoffman; Set: Sgt Larkin, Bob Smith (Professional)

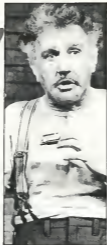
The Shifting Heart by Richard Beynon is a major Australian classic which richly deserves its current revival at Sydney's Marnie Street Theatre in stockbroker-belt Kildare.

It was not, even in 1936, a new theme for Australian drama: exhortations to "make the new chains welcome" had been common from the first. But Beynon's play had a new confidence: it is an accomplished and well-crafted piece of theatre, combining a fairly classical structure and plot with a refreshingly down-to-earth style of dialogue. There is a slight tendency to preach or underline the moral, but the portrait of the immigrant Italian family is drawn with striking accuracy.

Above all, the play has a voice. At the time of the first production, it may have seemed stridently radical, in retrospect, it seems clear, articulate and humanistic. It is the authentic voice of liberal Australia, asking for a caring, multi-cultural society to replace old sectarian misunderstandings and hatreds.

Drama with a social conscience is not normally noted for its box office success, but the warmth and humour of the characterisation in *The Shifting Heart* ensures popular appeal. John Krummel's production moves at a lively pace, bring the changes of mood well and for the most part avoiding sentimentality.

Peg Gilman's Poppy is a mixture of great subtlety and skill. Her-petted and belted, but always bouncing back cheerfully, he conveys a great deal of affection from the audience, which is turned to dramatic effect in his involvement. Philippa Baker's Monica caught perfectly the required note of hysteria, but tended to hold it too long. I



Poppy Burch (Peg Gilman) in Marnie St Theatre's *The Shifting Heart*

felt her performance had great power but lacked variety and shading. Joanna Lockwood as the pregnant Maria, was very much her Monica's daughter, going through the change from submissive young wife to dominant young mother.

One of the virtues of the play is that all of its eight parts offer the actors some challenge and some potential. Maria's Australian husband, Clarry, starts the play in a crude and boozy Ocker club, achieves some dignity as the brother-in-law of the murder victim demanding justice, and finally atones for the sacrifice, symbolically, by fathering a son. Kit Taylor, as Clarry, expressed richly the dilemma of a man caught between conflicting loyalties to two different cultures.

The Shifting Heart has tended to be overshadowed by its illustrious predecessor, Lancelotti's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, produced in 1953, the first Australian play to win wide international recognition. But its message may be more relevant to the Australia of the 'eighties. Beynon's plea for a more tolerant attitude to people with different languages and customs has a strong theatrical impact in the Marnie Street production.

CLOUD NINE

THE ELEPHANT MAN

by Michael Le Moignan

Cloud Nine by Caryl Churchill. Nimrod Upstart, Sydney. NSW. Opened August 11, 1991.

Director: Aubrey Miller; Design: Peter Fotherby; Musical Director: Michael Carlin; Lighting Designer: Jonathan Cohen; Assistant Director: Chris Johnson; Stage Managers: Anne Heath and John Woodhead; Cost: Carol J. Clay, Barry Gray, Betty Celia Fink, Andrew, John Hansen, Edward, Dennis Mahoney, Michael, Celia Dawson, Ellen, Michelle Jordan, Mrs Saunders, Anna Fink, Harry Bapley, John Walker (Act 1); Barry, David, Mahoney, Edward, Celia Fink, Patricia, Celia Dawson, Martin, John Hansen, Tommy, Anna Fink, Lisa, Michelle Jordan, Celia Barry, John, Celia, John Walker, Bill, Anna Fink (Professional)

The Elephant Man by Bernard Shaw. Ensemble, Sydney. NSW. Opened August 11, 1991.

Director: Helen Gordon; Design: Helen Gordon; Lighting Designer: John Hinchings; Stage Manager: Ian McRae; Production: Judy Fink; Assistant to the Director: Sandra Shaw.

Cost: Carl Goss, David Lobb, Pauline Tress, Patrick Barry, Ross, Brian, William, Ross, Celia, Barry, John, Henry, John, Elephant, Mark, Michael, Ross, Mrs, Michael, Helen, Patrick, Patricia, Alexander, John, Herbert, Will, Lord, John, Michael, O'Brien (Professional)

Two excellent new plays from the Nimrod and the Ensemble provide a fascinating contrast of styles and dramatic approach from the two Sydney theatres, here seen almost at their best. Nimrod's *Cloud Nine* is a provocative comedy of manners, which audibly means the audience to share the joke. The Ensemble's *Elephant Man* is a subtle and powerful piece of theatre which elicits a strong emotional response, a direct enlarging of our humanity.

Cloud Nine provides the first thoroughly enjoyable evening I have spent in Nimrod's Upstart Theatre since *Collected Writings*. Caryl Churchill's script, first performed at the Royal Court in London last year, shows a wonderful wit, a remarkable intelligence and a keen awareness of theatrical effect. Aubrey Miller's production is a delight from start to finish.

Cloud Nine is a sharp-tongued satire of sexual role-playing. The first act set in an outpost of British Colonial Africa in Victorian times, the second act in a city park in the present.

The play's argument, which is cogent and cleverly illustrated, is that the fundamental concept around which the British Empire was built was the family unit, so concerned by the stern writers of the Old

review

Testament, as performed by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, and as masterfully acted by thousands of would-be Royal Families in all the outposts of Empire.

This family unit forces all of its members to play the parts assigned to them without regard to character or suitability. So, to an extent, does the play; the Victorian manner, Betty, is played by a young man (Colin Firth), thereby underlining the ridiculousness of conventional feminine behaviour; the oldest son, Edward is played by a girl (Dorotea Roberstein), which makes the traditional exhortations to manliness sound equally cross.

The text is richly comic: mother-in-law Maud (Cathy Downes) has many of the best lines "Young women are never happy" she observes "then when they're older they look back and see that comparatively speaking they were estate."

It is Maud again who puts the Victorian theory of discipline in a nutshell, talking to the baby about her doll "Where did Vicky's naughty baby go? Shall we smack her? Just a little smack? There, now she's a good baby."

Appropriately, the characters are constantly reminding each other of their roles Maud "Betty, I am your mother" Betty "Clive gave you a home because you are my mother" And later Harry "You are a mother. And a daughter. And a wife."

Caryl Churchill's acerbic script makes the social conditioning process seem arbitrary, cruel and absurd. She reserves her sharpest barbs for the putnamarch himself, Clive, played with a magnificently material air by Barry Otto "You should always respect and love me, Edward, not for myself, I may not deserve it, but as I suspected and loved my own father, because he was my father. Through our father we love our Queen and our God, Edward. Do you understand? It is something men understand."

Clive is the personification of supremacy, white, male, adult, husband, father and master. He is also racist, hypocritical and self-deceiving. Self-righteously secure, he rebukes his old friend Harry, the explorer (John Wood) "You don't do it with natives, Harry? My God, what a betrayal of the Queen... Harry, I cannot keep a secret like this. Rivers will be named after you, it's unthinkable."

The script is littered with such *howls* and the astute reader will have gathered that I am trying to work as many



John Wood (John Wood) and Cathy Downes (Cathy Downes) in Churchill's *The Cause*

of them as possible into this review. There is the exotic, erotic Mrs Saunders (Anna Volkina) who declares she could never be a wife again "because there is only one thing about marriage that I like."

The second act of the play argues that while the British Empire has crumbled to dust, the midwestern notion of family responsibilities continues to exert a damaging influence, often crippling hopes of individual happiness. Freedom and loving friendship, Churchill's argument concludes, are attainable only if each individual has the courage to avoid the role pre-determined by the family, and choose a role suited to his or her personality and talent.

For such a sharp and witty play, there are some extraordinarily touching moments. Michelle Fawcett, as Len, the lesbian single mother, strikes a level between humanity and a just self-pride that is beautifully honest. Denise Rabinowitz's monologues, as the newly divorced grandmother who has just succeeded in masquerading to appear and is delighted with the discovery and her lack of guilt, as a small piece of theatrical magic. Barry Otto's portrayal, in the second act, of a seven-year-old girl, was perfect in every detail and indelibly funny.

The biggest laugh of the second half was reserved for the new patriarch, Martin (John Hancock), who tries to hide his alarm at seeing his power crumbling like the Empire did, behind a thin mask of free-thinking tolerance. His almost obsessive cynicism is his well disguised and more vigorously repressed by all his attempts at humouring his wife are deliciously transparent. "My one aim is to give you pleasure. My one aim is to give you rolling orgasms like I give other women. I'm not putting pressure on you but I don't think you're being a whole person. God knows I do everything I can to make you stand on your own two feet. Just be yourself! You don't seem to realise how insulting it is to me that you can't get yourself together again."

Cloud Nine is a brilliant play, perhaps a masterpiece. Even more exciting for Nimrod and its audience, who have had little to laugh at in the Upstream Theatre this year, *Cloud Nine* has inspired their increasingly confident resident company of actors to some of their best performances yet. With his three superb characterisations in *Harold's Pinter* and two more in this play, Barry Otto is making a strong claim to be the best character

actor in the country. He is a marvellously resourceful performer, with a seemingly inexhaustible well of grit and affliction. In his work with this company, there is a new maturity and strength that suggests he is only just beginning to realise his potential.

The Elephant Man vindicates the Ensemble's approach to theatre (by Hayden Gordon out of Stanislavsky) just as the Nimrod resident company's growing support vindicates its often-criticised "closed shop" policy.

The play is a triumph for Michael Ross, as the deformed "elephant man" John Merrick, who continues to be both hideously repulsive and enormously touching and appealing at the same time, all without the help of make up.

The importance of the deformity is not its shock value but its effect on the victim and those around him. Its effect on Merrick is to cut him off from the normal human contact and warmth he so desperately craves. Rejected by his own mother on account of his misshapen head and body, he has been deprived not only of love but of touch, and the moment when he first sets eyes on a naked female body is a remarkably intense piece of drama, which sets off a complex range of emotional and institutional rebarbations.

In *The Elephant Man*, as in *Cloud Nine*, Victorian journalism is perceived as the villain of the piece. Merrick's father-figures are first a "manager" who exploits him as a sideshow attraction and then steals his money, and later a well-meaning doctor whose concept of charity is awfully oppressive.

The poor elephant man becomes a celebrity, he is visited by royalty (a visit in the original version) and his needs are supplied for him. His physical needs are not emotional needs, and the elephant man dies for lack of love and understanding.

More than previous generations, we are trained daily to admire uniformity and conformity in physical appearance. The instinct to reject mutations is strong in most species, although they are subjected to the process of mutation for their very survival. One of the distinguishing marks of humanity as a species should be an open-minded and compassionate attitude to individuals that are different or deformed. But instincts are not easily overruled by cultural conditioning.

Old Testament concepts of guilt reinforce those instincts: the elephant man stands accused by his own ugliness.



John Merrick (Michael Ross) in the Ensemble's *The Elephant Man*

"People who think right don't look like that!" he is informed, unkindly.

The supporting cast goes through in a variety of roles, but for the most part, the eyes remain on Merrick: this is a very hypnotic, compelling performance from Michael Ross. Helen Flaherty contributes a well-timed, believable character on the scene, Miss Keadell, who befriends Merrick but is banished when her compassionate confidante with Victorian morality Colin Taylor shows great parasite in changing character back and forth from the casual manager to a positioning Bishop, with a hospital porter thrown in for good measure. Patrick Rowe, as the doctor, seems to have strayed in from a particularly melodramatic production of *Peter*.

Sharon Garton's set, composed of stark, white, curved shapes is appropriately cold and uncomfortable. Seen from the central block of seats, it effectively frames Merrick at crucial moments.

The Elephant Man is a very intimate play. It will strike individuals in widely different ways because its effect depends largely on individual reactions to the complex web of ideas and values set up by the play.

In great strength, as theatre, is that it poses a deeply challenging question to each member of the audience: it asks whether you would be able to find some sympathy for this travesty of a man. And in a production that works as well as this one does, it goes further, and stimulates the imagination to the point of making the audience actually feel that sympathy.

Savagely simple TRAITORS

by Sue Williams

Trained by Stephen Sewell, Darwin Theatre Group at Darwin Mnt, Darwin NT. Opened August 24, 1991. Director: Robert Kimber, Designer: Barbara Cox.

At the risk of offending the conservative Darwin populace, DTG took a bold leap into an Art-and-style drama in the production of Stephen Sewell's *Traitors*. The parody of sex, violence and reality was arguably too threatening for the local patrons, who did not clamour for more, although no one left at interval. But this production's success cannot be measured by the box office; it is perhaps the finest drama Darwin has yet seen.

The bold, unflinching interpretations of the actors and the bare bones of this stark play created a compelling metaphor of alienation and betrayal. It is one of the play's strengths that the language is almost savagely simple, and devoid of imagery.

The drama is of post-revolutionary Russia: the conflict between the Bolsheviks under Stalin and a small faction of Party members loyal to Trotsky and anxious to hold to the ideals of the proletarian struggle. Portrayed as the tension and paranoia of secrecy and fear of detection of the oppositionists and the Siberian oppression of criticism that, cancer-like, grew to a purge of millions.

Robert Kimber's director on allowed full focus on the brutal content aimed out to the victims of the Party. Tight, clean and very frank, the action and characterisation turned the play's unfocused opening into an appropriate image of confusion.

The stark design by Barbara Cox was visually compelling; the dancing portrait of Stalin loomed large, magnifying the play's bleak vision. The muted stage underscored the tension and there was an exciting use of the theatre's hydraulic lifts: as torture racks in one scene and railway carriage in another.

The play is meant to be shocking — and the production shied. Its breadth of vision encompassed not just the individual suffering of loyalty to an ideal pitted against the tyranny of powerful opposition. It was also an intense portrayal of the disintegration of the oppressor.

Marcus Eyre as Grigori Krasin was controlled and powerful, essential in the portrayal of the persecuted persecutor who



*Terry Kennwick (Colonel Lebedev) and Marcus Eyre (Grigori Krasin) in Darwin Theatre Group's *Traitors*. Photo: Phillip Whitcombe*

is designated to extract a confession from the political prisoner he is then determined to execute. From the peace and safety of the early scenes to the wrecked and hunted suicide, he performed Krasin's decline superbly.

But it was Ken Conway's portrayal of the tortured Ruben that crystallised the play's power and horror. His razor-edged control on the physical instability was balanced by Terry Kennwick's finely-wrought chill as the powerbroker, bowing also to the will of the conspirator Stalin.

Marilynne Haragan as Anna fulfilled audience expectation — she is a natural actress — allowing the audience to concentrate on the play's tensions. And in her relationship with Terry Lasser's Ekaterina there were moments of warmth and humour that contrasted well with the tragedy, inherent fear of the play.

The production's flaw was the characterisation of Mother Dybenko by Jessica Knight, who managed only to present a caricature of a crime and that undermined the tool of motivating fear possible in the figure of this spy.

The technical difficulties of *Traitors* were well-matched by Tim Cow, who, apart from Robert Kimber, is the company's only professional. But professional or amateur considerations are non-relevant — in anybody's language DTG's production was exciting.

First class performance I SENT A LETTER TO MY LOVE

by Jeremy Ridgman

I Sent a Letter To My Love by Bernard Rubens. Queensland Theatre Company. MALL Theatre, Brisbane. Opened August 20, 1991.

Director: Ken Gifford. Set Designer: James White. Sound Designer: Douglas Jackson. Musician: Jimmy, Justin, Warren, Tony, Mervyn, Patrick, William. Cost. Mnt. Wardrobe: Vicki. Hair: Robert Alexander. Technical: Anne Morrison. Props: Frank Lloyd, Vito. Manager: Jennifer Blackledge.

(Part 1 of 2)

As well as being cursed with an unfortunate and unrepresentatively maleish title, Bernard Rubens' first play is seriously flawed. Frustratingly episodic and over-long, it moves aimlessly from the proposition that a middle-aged spender living with and caring for his paraplegic brother, can engage in an anonymous, lonely letters correspondence with him to a climax in which he loses her for marriage and she, first struck down by psychosomatic paralysis, dies of what can only be described as a broken heart.

Perhaps surprisingly, notwithstanding between the lame and the melodrama is an engaging and frequently interesting lyrical drama on the theme not only of disablism but of the power of imagination to make the firm of life and love. In structure there, poetic tone, even in the choice of setting, a setting on the edge of a South Wales coastal community. Rubens seems to raise the spirit of Synge's *Playboys*. For the ironically named Arty, the 'loved one', epistolary communication with her brother's hopes and needs is part of a quest for warmth in a world darkened by the paralyzing shadows of chapel, parental pain and the rural routine; in the end, she like Poppo, scatches her chances of spiritual liberation while the apparent lines in her life drag ahead into unforeseen independence.

Perhaps the structural faults of the play are those of a writer running for the first time from fiction to the stage. Rubens also makes what might be the novelists' mistake of striving for a dual dramatic identity for his protagonists, having her step regularly into a direct address relationship with the audience which, mawkishly, develops in Victorian regressive style. (Did

you hear that, my loveless!") as the playfully approacher. Marilyn Allen handles these moments well and pushes through the play's stunts in some and exposition in others with a combination of rare breadth and subtlety. Robert Alexander's Sam, who's living that way, is a perfect foil and there are first class supporting performances from Kaye Newcross as a holdbound partisan for whom a pinch on the bum constitutes an urge, Frank Hoad as her brother, straggled also and striving for the love of a hickwife, and Jennifer Blackledge as an actress usually all local Reggimento, but rehearsing in bathos (grooming before the challenge of portraying the person of Sam's terrible imagination. From Kevin Palmer, one might have wished a firmer hand with the blue pencil, but his astute casting and careful tonal modulation have gone a long way to making the play's somewhat disparate elements

Conviction no joke THE ENEMY WITHIN

by Veronica Kelly

The Enemy Within by George Mowbray La Bove
(Theatre: Brisbane Qld. Opened August 31 1991)
(Producer: Melinda Blackledge, Stage Manager: Richard Clutter)
Cast: Magda Lisa Blackledge, Sophie Bruce Whang, Mrs. Kellerman Sandra Huan with Sophie Blackledge
1991: 1991

At La Bove, an intensely serious play about Hitlerian fascism, acted with finesse and conviction by a four woman cast. It examines political responsibility as it affects women, through whose eyes we see the birth, ascendancy and fiery defeat of German fascism, and whose acts of support, compromise or resistance form the play's moral pattern.

In 1912 Magda is a schoolgirl, dad is in the SS, and her petty bourgeois paragonism forbids her loyalty towards her friend Sophie, whose father is a communist, ordering the girl, haunted by communists, from her house. Magda, rigidly but incompletely reclaimed by her family with their racial class, race and anti-communist views, is tilted towards release from her self-deception and distress by the offer of a "privileged" and valued



Sandra Huan and Lisa Blackledge in *The Enemy Within*

role in the new Germany. She is coerced and co-opted into supporting "her" man rather than the moral claims of humane justice. Her part, it turns out, is loyalty to provide the womanly comforts when her husband comes home shattered after a hard day's sloughing, and unexpectedly, to give her body to be used as a confessional.

Just as the hidden strength of women fuels all the public work of the world, so too it has a fundamental role in maintaining the neo-fascist fever of fascism. Magda collaborates, and in return receives peace, security and happiness with her children and husband, a propaganda filmmaker. "I'm only a woman," she tells herself. "I can change nothing anywhere. Besides, it's not me they want to kill."

As the war progresses Magda becomes increasingly aware of what is really happening all over Europe, and of the contradictions of her position. Even the pro-Hitler Mrs. Kellerman is obviously aware on a well-suppressed level of the savage alternative to total support for the Reich. Magda's inner-outer Remise is an association of bleak strict opinions. Her self-possession seems at first a source of strength, but it is she who spells out to Magda the unpalatable truth, this is not war but terror, not in conquered countries but at home, and the life of every German depends on silent complicity in the daily mass murders of the disaffected. Silence at the deaths of others was once the price, now it must be silence still, even as the terror takes Magda's own family.

Finally, at the fall of Berlin, Magda and her mother hide terrified from a Red Army and for rape and murder in revenge for their many millions of dead. Here they encounter Sophie, armed and truculent, who has survived by the hard and heroic path of consciousness and resistance. The last scenes between these three are the play's finest, living up to the momentous and tough realities they deal with.

An excellent cast, with Sandra Huan outstanding as the perfectly dainty Mrs. Kellerman, making this crucial juncture believable. The Mrs. K's really isn't, and though one can laugh at this over-the-top, the conviction behind it is no joke. Lisa Blackledge's Magda is vulnerable, generous-minded, caused only by a dangerous moral conscience, but whose unquenched stirrings make her a credible recipient of the play's challenge. Millions die, and you dare to say, it's not my fault, I am a woman.

Decent and differentiated A LESSON FROM ALOES

by Michael Morley

A Lesson From Aloes by Athol Fugard. APCT and ABTL, Playhouse, Adelaide SA. Opened September 4 1991.

Director, Gillian Owen, Designer, Warren Fittall, Lighting, Walter van Peltwyck, Stage Manager, Brian Maudsley.

Cost, Port Anthony Whelan, Gladys, Olive Boddy, Steve, Philip Hines (Professors).

In earlier works, such as *Some Bitter with Dead*, *The Island* and *Burmese Boy* and *Leno*, Athol Fugard has paid particular attention to the sufferings of the blacks and the inequities of the apartheid system in South Africa. Those fortunate enough to see *Some Bitter* and *The Island* in 1976 are not likely to forget in a hurry the power of Fugard's vision and the commitment and energy of the two marvellously gifted black actors who formed the nucleus of his company.

However, it is not simply a comparison with these earlier works and performers which leaves this particular viewer somewhat disoriented by and disappointed with Fugard's latest play, which began its Australian season in Adelaide. The fundamental questions of betrayal and commitment lie at the heart of this work, but Fugard chooses to concentrate more on a domestic treatment of these themes at the expense of relating them to the wider political context. This is not to say that *A Lesson From Aloes* lacks any political thrust: the relationship between Port, the Adhikaaner, and Steve, the half-caste, is one of the more subtle attempts on Fugard's part to explore the problematic situation of individuals seeking to survive under apartheid and preserve something approximating to an identity and sense of integrity. All high-minded and somewhat kooky-sounding concepts, but it has always been Fugard's strength to be able to relate these two and root them firmly in specific individuals and their problems.

After a bus boycott, Port had joined a cell of radical blacks, to which Steve belonged, but he is now suspected of having informed on Steve, who has just been released from jail after serving a sentence for breaking a curfew order. I



am uncertain whether it was because of Fugard's rather self-conscious deployment of the old retrospective technique so extensively deployed by those that made me feel somewhat perturbed by the first half, or the obvious setting up of expectations on the audience's mind as to the arrival of Steve. There is, for example, never much doubt that, for all the talk of a large dinner party, he is the only one who will eventually and belatedly turn up.

Thus he does in Act II, and Philip Hines's performance as Steve gave the play a much-needed lift at this stage, introducing as he did a welcome note of differentiation and energy in his performance. Port, on the first half, Olive Boddy's nervous and hysterical Gladys had succeeded in inducing in me no emotion more complex than the wish to stand her under a cold shower. There is surely more in Fugard's portrayal of Gladys to allow

the actress to look for other ways of playing hysteria and neurosis: the insistence on breathless *dimmiando/crescendo/dimmiando* delivery merely became tedious and unconvincing, and came perilously close to turning the character into simple caricature.

Anthony Whelan's Port was decent, honest, at times painfully philistine: it was a low-key reading of the role and, one felt, perhaps a little too intent on seeking the audience's sympathy from the very beginning. One of the focal points of the play's suspense is surely the uncertainty which needs to be induced in the audience as to whether Port really is a traitor: whether, as some of the cell suspect, it was he who betrayed Steve to the authorities.

One's reactions to the play might conceivably have been somewhat different had Gillian Owen's direction been more pointed and sensitive: but at no stage did the characters engage our attention and present their predicament in a way that enabled us to respond to the injustice of it all. Part of this is undoubtedly attributable to the choice of setting the play within the prisonroom *and*: why this had been done was beyond me, leaving as it did a most between the first rows of the audience and the events on stage which no amount of overplaying could bridge.

And though no one can doubt Fugard's commitment, honesty and command of dialogue, there were moments in the play where one began to feel that this restrained, subtle attempt to treat the situation in South Africa as it affected those people was just a little too conservative and restrained. Even the play's central symbol, the aloe which, with their spines, stalks and tough leaves are able to survive the rigours of the South African climate, seemed somewhat contrived and literary. After all, Port cultivates them, having turned his back, it appears, on political commitment.

One wonders whether the political realities of South Africa and the violence of its regime and the supporters of apartheid can be adequately combined by a play as decent and differentiated as *A Lesson From Aloes*. Fugard's belief in the necessity of a bloodless struggle to abolish apartheid must be proven the lie to when one looks at what is happening in New Zealand at present, and recalls that a South African chief of police boasted that he could have fired the demonstrators in Hamilton with a few carefully chosen squads of thugs. After all, they have had years of practice



Max Gillies in *Squirts*

A sign of the times

SQUIRTS

by Gus Worby

Scripted by David Allen, Patrick Cook, Barry Barker, Tim Robertson, John Rosser, Stephen Sewell, Don Watson, Hurlbrook Williams, David Williamson. **Star** Elton Company. **Producers** Adelaide, SA. **Opened** August 14, 1981

Director Neil Armistead. **Designer** Stephen Curtis. **Musical Director** Alan John. **Lighting** Nigel Levinge

Cost Max Gillies and Alan John (Producers)

The idea for the show which is now called *Squirts* is six years old. In those days at the APG its working title was *A Night with the Right*. This was a safe enough joke, it seemed, until the Whitlam Government was sacked and a night with the Right became *Life with the Right*. This was a different proposition. A lot of ideas were jettisoned then.

What might have been a bawdy, irreverent evening of fine satirist and some mockery has gone "off" in the throwing process. In an alternative theatre famed for its buffoonery, riot and abuse, Max Gillies could have paraded his emotions to boots and catcalls yet belied them in laughter. He still may be able to do that in a theatre like the Universal, or with a home-screen following, but in the Playhouse there was neither the atmosphere, nor the inclination to see this array of magistrates, potentates and "person-

alities", as anything but grotesque, and little desire to distance the proceedings with laughter, even if the views expressed were shared.

Lack of humour is not a laughing matter, and the real-life models for these theatrical "squirts" are, almost without exception, humourless. Worse still they appear to share the same sense of humbuggery. This has stymied writers of diverse style but proven ability, and reflects upon scripts and presentation a sort of mounting desperation. There's so much to aim at — so little to hurt. It also makes life hard for the protean Mr Gillies and his hard-working off-stage Alan John. It is, empty, a sign of the times.

In the antediluvian days of Australian-Empero, there were, according to Menzies' Law, two kinds of politicians: statesmen and squirts. Statesmen looked at least a year ahead, squirts were pre-

occupied with what was lagging round their ankles. This is a show about life after the Deluge, when the first article of political survival — learn to tread water and make people think that you're walking on it — seems to lack something in the face of Armageddon. It begins with a Roccosian and retreats from the elevation of our one and only Lord Warden to an LJ Hooker Heaven, through the Constitutional Crisis, to the Leadership Crisis and on to future salvation in the Barrage. Perry Cross — courtesy USAF. Then we stop along the way — dithering terminations from the days of uncovered wickets and Walter than White horses, an occasional greeting from Her Majesty to her Objects, a heavy-handed media message (like a leopard club in your own theatre), a punk lament, and a rerun of the "Wake-up-Australia" birthday fight with a napalm afterburn.

Amongst these familiar facts of life, and at the cross-roads of history, *Squirts* makes one shattering revelation — a Gillies was there. Sir Robert Gillies, John Gillies Singleton, Elizabeth Regina Gillies, John Kerr-Gillies, Madame Keanthy Gillies, Gillies Lang Hancock, and more. Who better than to represent them than Maxwell "Lops" Gillies? This comparatively harmless Max is perhaps the most fortunate of his clan, for all the others seem to have been permanently afflicted, as though, dare one say it, there was a stuff-up at the drafting gate. This doubtless accounts for the fascinating intrusion of a Tasmanian non-entity — Mr Noddy Gillies — a hillbilly Gillies, who made a memorable impression on the otherwise true-like evening with his rocking chair, wellington boots, a shotgun and a plaque for services rendered. You can pick a thought-provoked a mile off. His more celebrated relatives were less complex specimens, merely buff of tooth, hair, bearing, trousers, cheeks humanity, simply addicted to booze, then-lipped smiles, cigarettes and real estate, straightforwardly paranoiac. One among their number however rivaled Noddy, with his prosthetic jaw, orthopedic corsets and endless bifocals. One man of destiny in search of a plaque of his own and a word from the old crack, stood head and shoulders above the rest — Mal the Black-Knight-Gillies. There was indeed a statesmanlike quality to his "bull and frank" declaration of war on the rest of the world — except Ronald US President Gillies.

But, y'know, there's one sure-fire way to

get the real measure of a spirit. You stand him, or her, against all the opposition. There's more points to a fight with the Right than if it's not borch of a solid Left. I wonder if anyone will ever again stage a hunt for squats in the Plokenen Jungle, or give Pelly another chance to loose his infantile machos on their world.

With Gillies at the centre, playing just half of his remarkable experience, and a couple more colleagues to lend a hand, that would be a Night to Remember.

Honesty and some power ANNIE'S COMING OUT

by Gus Worley

Annie's Coming Out by Ron Hoegmy, adapted/revived book by Rosemary Crossley and Anne McDonald. Troupe Theatre Company. Adelaide S.A. Opened September 1981.

Director: Peter Dunn, Designer: Lisa Philip-Morris, Lighting: Richard Chalmers
Cast: Anne, Christine Anderson; Ron, Virginia Baxter; Dennis Davis; Terry, de Tropic; O'Connor, Morris Hughes; Ron Hoegmy, Chris, Lesley; Richard Collins.
(Professional)

Annie's Coming Out makes only a moderate theatrical impact as Ron Hoegmy's adaptation of the book by Rosemary Crossley and Anne McDonald. The fact that it isn't a great play doesn't matter at all. It manages to tell an amazing story with honesty and some power. What counts is that Troupe have again used the no-life theatre to bring a truly heated fight for life and rights to the attention of a public who might otherwise have missed it.

The production is measured in pace, slow but purposeful in its build, spread-eagled in design. The dramatisation, like the story, is long and open-ended. Each element serves to emphasise the insurmountable obstacles, set-backs and violations endured and overcome by Anne McDonald in her attempts to convince mental health authorities that a diagnosis of "sexually abused", at the age of three, is in her case an undeserved and unjust incarceration.

The dramatic heart of the story beats in the fierce and loving relationship between Anne and Ron, the Assistant and playgroup leader at St Nicholas hospital, Melbourne, who discusses not only Anne's intelligence and that of other "beastings", but speaks out for them all. Virginia Baxter and Tina Anderson cap-

tivate the excitement, tenderness, and danger of this partnership. They, in keeping with the production, keep away from the anger and the hate. Baxter builds, with great care, a cocoon of concentration, and fixes a circle of attention around Anne, which permits Anderson to use a limited facial, vocal and physical "vocabulary" with skill and sensitivity. They achieve some quite special moments.

It is when the pace moves outside this relationship to admit other difficulties, other tragedies than Anne's, in the midst of "community apathy, bureaucratic deadness, and twisted punishing promises" that it loses momentum. Ron's encounters with the outside world must, of necessity, be brief (Anne is always waiting), and this means that they are not always convincing. These are the moments when the needs of the theatre make themselves most strongly felt. The writing is not always able to meet the challenge.

It is largely as a result of this lack of depth, for example that Richard Collins, as Chris, is forced into providing "contrast" for the production as a whole as the exposure of more complex characterisation. As Ron's man, the masculinity of support, Chris is an important and potentially complex figure, but he is not well enough rounded in either playing or conception to fulfill all the extra-mural implications of sterns, prejudice, and devotion to which he is expected to respond. In much the same way O'Connor the supporting officer at St Nick's, is set up by Hoegmy. To be sure he needs the evidence and sees Anne as a trouble-maker, but what makes him tick? His human fallibility is as much a problem for Anne and Ron as his bureaucratic impersonality. We see only the latter.

I make this point, not to minimise Anne's battle with the system, but to suggest that there is another play within the story. It is a play about the myriad states of psychosis, incoherence, stammerings of unintelligible and unacknowledged voices which surround Anne's silence. Jo Turner's strong rendering of the harassed and disgruntled nursing aides, Bianca and Dawn, testifies to this. I thank Ron Hoegmy, Peter Dunn and the other members of the team who set to tackle that play as well - without losing Anne. If this results in theatrical compromise it in no way lessens the impact of Anne's liberation. She is out, thank God and her freedom only serves to remind us of those still locked away, waiting for their Ron.

Drought breaks at Hobart's Theatre Royal

BETRAYAL

by Pamela Hyland

Directed by Harold Foster. Tasmanian Theatre Company. Theatre Royal Hobart, Tasmania. Opened August 26, 1981.

Director, John Vukobrat; Designer, Don Hayes; Stage Manager, Chris Griffin; Cost Designer, Chris Williams; Jury, John Leary; Robert John Phelps, A writer; David Pidge, (Production)

When a state theatre company mounts a local production of a play for the first time in some years on its main theatre, one's pleasure in the event must outweigh any objections to its previous policies. The announcement that the TTC would stage Foster's *Betrayal* in the Theatre Royal was thus acclaimed in Hobart theatre circles as the breaking of the drought, and a healthy move away from their largely entrepreneurial role to one of challenging the position of the other local professional company, Polygon. TTC has staged local productions, such as Michael Lanchbury's acclaimed production of Whitehead's *Spring Awakening*, but these have been staged in what pass in Hobart for "fringe" theatres, not in the Theatre Royal.

So the first night audience was expecting a showpiece and opinion is divided on whether or not they got it. Was it the play or the production? Certainly, *Betrayal* is not typical Foster. It lacks some of the biting bleakness of earlier plays, yet there are, as usual, those gaps between what can be said in which the overwhelming pre-occupation pushes through, and in which language across the gaps takes on the form of some nightmare. The programme stated "One way of looking at speech is to say it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness." This is to say that the silence says more than the prattle that breaks it, or at least it should. But there was not enough silence in this production. Only John Phelps seemed in control, wading of pause, confident and often remarkably close to the edge.

A relatively crackling pace began to fill in did not contrast like that, but the main difficulty in the production was concerned with the use of pause and the development of tension. That this was served comes very much from the casting.

In the second scene John Phelps' staid and careful demeanour, studied the pace and the production settled, John Lavery taking his cue from his partner. The contrast between the two extremes of vocal style, that of Miss Williams and Mr Phelps provides the main criticism of the production. There was so much disparity that John Lavery's Jerry was caught in a sort of vocal limbo adapting pace and delivery, most commendably in the circumstances, to suit the style of whoever he was with at the time. This made it rather difficult for the audience to decide where he was, particularly when he gave up the struggle and resorted to facial mapping, to cover his anxiety in the process.

The tension did work in two memorable scenes. In Robert and Emma's living room in the autumn of 1978, Emma is completely estranged by Robert's presence and cold exploration of why she would not be welcome as a squatter with him and Jerry, or to lunch afterwards, in fact not welcome at all. But the greatest betrayal was of Emma's self by herself.

Admirable as the individual performances were in their own way, there was a lack of ensemble playing which one assumes should have been created in John Unsworth's direction, although his stark and clinical production was powerful. Perhaps there was too much overcompensation in style.

Don Boyer's act was very effective and was used fluidly by the players. The mood was uneasy. Heavy black drapes sometimes half concealed the stage. There were three, perhaps four, spaces where scenes occurred without the interruption of a divided revolve with its accompanying potential for going wrong. The clinical observation of the effects of the triangle, eternal but still painful, was made effective by overhead, under-lighting. The final silhouette, she moved and splash of dress and arms was especially effective.

Punter's view of life, as a black comedy, was supported by some good comic timing, particularly in the minor role of the Italian waiter (David Puck) who came close to stealing his scene.

The performance needs more control to match the restraint in the design. Half the time we don't hear, too busy with our inner lives. John Phelps was really the only one of the actors to show a total understanding of Punter's view of the unpopulated exterior which sometimes covers these names.

Wan flutterings and kosher comedy

THE SUICIDE TRUE WEST NEWS UNLIMIT! THE COVENANT OF THE RAINBOW THE GOLDEN GOLDENBERGS INTERROGATION OF ANGEL

by Garric Hutchinson

The Suicide by Nicole Erismann, mounted by Peter Engel Melbourne Theatre Company, Russell Street Theatre, Melbourne. Vis. Opened August 1981
Director, Judith Alexander, Designer, Paul Rothman, Lighting, Janet Lamb.

Cast: Sonya Sengstacker, Peter Katschewski, Graeme Haggitt, Maria Lukanovska, Peter McLeod, Brindley Bonham, Jacqueline Kallies, Amanda, Donald Hansen, Margaret, Beverly Dunn, Andrew, Chris Hallen, with Linda Williams, John Bowman, Christopher Smith, Robert Horrell, Rhonda Green, David Cunningham, David Lamb.

(Professional)

True West by Sam Shepard, Playbox Theatre Company, Playbox Theatre, Melbourne, Vis. Opened August 1981
Director, Rex Cunningham, Designer, Robert D'Arco, Stage Manager, Dennis Hickey, Lighting Designer, Brent Robinson.

Cast: Austin, David Cameron, Les, Peter Cameron, Sam, Gus Manning, Mary, Eve Gentry.

(Professional)

Newspaper of the Future by Roger Federer, La Mama Theatre, Melbourne. Vis. Opened August 5, 1981
Director, Roger Federer, Designer, Peter Corbridge, Lighting Designer, Jay Harris, Original Music, Rex Cunningham, Rick Katschewski, Mary Smith.
Cast: George, Kenneth Howard Stanley, George, Katherine, Peter Harding.

The Covenant of the Rainbow by Roger Federer, La Mama Theatre, Melbourne. Vis. Opened August 5, 1981.

Cast: Hector, Lisa Armstrong, Benardine, Nina Lamb, Captain Peter Harding, Clayton Howard Smith, Little Girl, Stephen Pearson.

(Professional)

The Golden Goldenbergs by Barry Holman, Playbox Theatre Company, Playbox Theatre, Melbourne, Vis. Opened August 5, 1981
Cast: John, Brian Corbridge, Barbara Morgan, Gary Saunders, Brenda, Cheryl Woodhouse, Kristina Woodhouse, Ray Baldwin, Zella, Billy Hammerberg.

(Professional)

Interrogation of Angel by Barry Holman
Cast: John Harvey, Gary Saunders, Stephen Clark, Ray Baldwin, Sue Pratt, Michael, Robin Corbridge, Rex, Cheryl Woodhouse.
Back plays: Director, William Smith, Designer, Judith Alexander, Choreographer, Cheryl Woodhouse, Lighting and Stage Management, Robert Cohen.

Watching Judith Alexander's production of Erismann's *The Suicide*, it's difficult to understand why it was banned in the USSR. A more convincing piece it would be hard to find. Nor is it much evidence for Gorky's claim that Erismann is 'our new Gogol', or Nikolai Mandulstam's that the play is 'the best in the Soviet repertoire'.

That sounds like one hell of a play. It obviously needs one hell of a production, for the MTC presentation is long, unclear in line, and situated in any particular environment, and worst of all fails to take the ideas, the critical point of the comedy, seriously.

Semyon is an ordinary, insignificant human who is released employment. He contemplates suicide, and is immediately swamped with offers from people who want to use his death as a gesture on their behalf. The Russian intelligentsia, Art, business, politicians, the Church. In the end he chooses life over death, all he wants is a 'quiet life and a living wage'.

It's the point of view of the ordinary man against both the revolutionary bureaucracy and the old regime in a text that was written in a particular economic and social situation in the Soviet Union. If pre-war Russia was awful, by the time Erismann was writing and trying to get the play produced it was pretty plain that the revolution was a flop, especially for the unemployed.

We would, I think, have a right to expect a production that took some note of the content of the play, especially in the delineation of the characters trying to use Semyon, and in the portrayal of the real background.

We would not expect some wan fluttering in the direction of constructivism on painted backdrops, and tacky representations of wooden walls.

The performances in general lacked any physical detail that would convey to an audience they knew what they were doing. They all seemed more or less half-hearted caricatures than the full blown characters, or even gross caricatures which would have been better.

They seemed not to be aware that they were characters which represented something real, ideas that were real, but also ideas and characters that bore some relevance to 'unemployment', 'Australians', 'relevance', 'unemployment', 'marginal unions, dopey romantic and so on.

It's a play that needs a real ensemble playing to the efforts of Linda Williams, Graham Handell and John Bowman, who

have some idea of what they're doing, are to be avast!

It's simply an awful production.

Sam Shepard is a dirty, filthy writer because he appears to be so simple, a quality only present in the very best. It's a quality that demands the very best from actors and directors, and nearly gets it with Rex Cusumano, Peter Cummings and David Cameron.

True West has a budding screenwriter untroubled by his older, dithering brother. They're in their mother's house while she's away. At first young smart brother is dominant, but after a visit from the Producer, the roles become reversed. The brothers are two sides of the one coin, almost the one person.

Shepard appears to be making a point about human nature made families, brotherly bonds, double-sidedness. (Luckily the feelings generated by the images in his plays are more subtle than Shepard's explanations of them.) He seems to think, like O'Neill, that there is something rotten at the core of the American family, and for Shepard, especially those in the West.

The farthest West you can go from the Old World, before it becomes East, and where it's corrupt and rotten in the heart — that's Shepard's true west.

The younger brother goes out on a bit to steal treasure, to prove he can survive in the "desert", while the other brother tries to write an imitable screenplay. You can see for the first time two or a dozen brothers at work, popping up randomly, filling the theatre with the smell of breakfast. It's a disturbing and funny image.

Peter Cummings and David Cameron adjust to their changing roles very nicely, though I find the feeling a would-be better if they slowed down a little, let the text work for them a bit harder, but the role swapping is achieved without any strain, the subversive/dominant relationship of the brothers nicely balanced.

If the final impression of Cummings's production is that the play is too and, too sparse, then that's in the text. In his own way, Shepard is among the most delicate writers around, and he got as good a production as he's likely to get in Melbourne.

Roger Pulver is a nice writer who'd like to touch on things, and has a go in a double bill at La Mama.

The second play, *The Ceremony of the Rainbow*, takes place on a ship not going

anywhere in the middle of the ocean. How to get it moving? What's wrong with it? Can medicine help? Can music? Can academia? Religion? The Captain? Nothing will it seems, in this "barrel", fractured piece. It's presumably a crazy image that stands for the world, Australia, something. Or its purpose is to generate feelings of nonsense, unrelated images in the hearts and minds of the audience. Your guess is as good as mine.

The first play, *News Unlearned*, has a clearer line.

Two journalists meet in a Central American country, one is a Russian, and the other an Australian. They discover they know and like each other's work for the reason that they hate what they have to write for their respective masters.

The Russian hates Soviet masters, admires the Western point of view, wishes he could write like that. The Australian hates capitalist masters, admires the revolutionary point of view, wishes he could write like that.

They decide to swap roles. Russian writes Australian's copy, and vice versa. It's a great success, they are rewarded. When the revolution they are reporting succeeds, they are both in trouble — what to do, they swap identities so that they can be punished for the line they believe in.

Do you believe that? That journalists are interchangeable, that they are hypocrites that they say one thing and write another? Please their masters? There are arguments both ways, I guess. *True Magazine* or *Vietnam* versus *Washington Post* or *Washington*. Murdoch and the Australian, Fairfax/Syde and The Age.

As for the Soviet Press, I once played tennis with the man from *Pravda* and he believed every word he wrote.

The Pulver plays are performed with great enthusiasm and élan, in time-honoured La Mama style, directed by the author at a vigorous pace, I liked Howard Stanley and Peter Waddington especially.

Barry Dickson is the best thing to happen to playwrighting in Melbourne since you last laughed at Rod Quastack, or Jack Hibberd. Anyway he's getting better all the time, now that he's arrived at a style that is a cross between Joe Orton and Sam Beckett, if they came from Reserve and sat in the pub a lot.

The second play is his double bill upstairs at the Playbox, *Interrogation of Angel* is simply the best new play I've seen in Melbourne since Sewall's *Travels*.

If there was any justice in the theatre (there isn't) it would run for the rest of the year.

First, *The Golden Goldenberg*. God only knows what to make of the Last Supper of Jewish comedians, a pastiche of devious shaggy dog stories, absurd fantasies, mad jokes, riding bicycle pumps, playing the crayfish, reverses and dreams, poetry love and prose. It's very funny at the time, depending almost entirely on carrying from one page to the next moment, and the over-theatrical characterisations of a terrific cast.

It's just plain foolish, but it's a very foolish comedy.

Interrogation of Angel is another kettle of fish.

John Kenny arrives at a police station to report his car stolen. He finds that the policemen are alternately scary, violent and seemingly sane. He ends up killing them, and his girlfriend as well. Then he goes home.

This is the mad underbelly of *The Revolution*, this is what the Butler actually saw, then what Godon wanted for, if you catch my drift.

It's a controlled mixture of mind shifts, from the reasonable to the outrageous, romantic to the unreasonable.

One minute Sgt Sack and Sgt Shehead are asking questions, the next Sgt Shehead is on a bike doing a bit out of Quirk, one second one of them is about to shoot poor John, the next they are members of the Police Poetry Society.

It's difficult to describe the shifts, the combination of the brutal and the extraordinary, jokes, but it does remind me most of all of the artlessness of Joe Orton, it has that same feel of things not being what they seem, things, words, being taken on their value then turned upside down. It's mostly a comedy between the two cops, with poor John being the innocent caught in the mad house, commenting silently with his face. It's nicely controlled all the way through, and just when you think nothing more can happen, the whole mad policeman scene is topped by the arrival of the girlfriend, and her insane behaviour, before she is shot as well.

The performance from Gary Samolin, Roy Baldwin and Robin Cuning are marvellous, and William Cluth has done a terrific job in pacing and imaging the pace.

It's the best thing I've seen by Barry Dickson, one of the best comedies by anyone in Melbourne.

Revivals — pros and cons

PYGMALION OKLAHOMA

by Margo Luke

Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw, National Theatre Company, Playhouse, Perth WA, opened August 31, 1991.

Director: David Addendrook **Designer:** Tony Trigg **Costumes:** Steve Nelson **Lighting:** Duane Orr **Stage Manager:** Richard Hendry **Cast:** Alan Eyreford, Hilary Beattie, Max Eyreford, Bill Lee, Catherine, Freddie, Nigel Wright, Eliza Doolittle, Miss Gubel, Colonel Pickens, James Beattie, Higgins, Raymond Davies, Mrs. Pearce, Margaret Ford, Alfred Doolittle, Perilla Beattie, Mrs. Higgins, Patricia Macgregor, with Carol Robert, Gloria Henry, Teresa Ward, Andrew Macgregor, Ray Richardson, Patrick Spence. *(Professionals)*

Outstanding: Rogers and Simonson. **Casts:** Mrs. Higgins's Part: WA General August 1991 **Director:** David Addendrook **Costume Designer:** Steve Nelson **Stage Manager:** Bill Hendry **Lighting:** Richard Stuart, **Choreographer:** Barry Newlands *(Amateurs)*

Revivals of old favourites have their pros and cons. True, they will be more likely to attract that large proportion of the audience that wants to play it safe, but, rather unfairly perhaps, at the same time they expect something fresh and new. This means that the director has to work hard either on innovations, or simply competing with the legends and memories of the past — make it bigger, brighter, faster, louder, or, most difficult of all, better.

David Addendrook's *Pygmalion* at the Playhouse succeeds despite the innovations rather than because of them. He has jugged the text — including bits of the film-script, and has turned the chinily upper-class Eyreford-Hills into comic relief — one squawking, another being a Derek Nimmo clone, which is jarring, though it does have its funny moments. Also, for some obscure reason, Higgins' Hungarian ex-pupil talks with a faint-Irish accent decreed in all but ABC serials and looking like a winner from the Grassy Specie, which is clearly ridiculous, as the man wouldn't have reached the back door of the Embassy, let alone the ball room.

But Higgins aside, the production is strong on the things that matter. First of all, there is Star Gold as Eliza Doolittle: a little too slender in her early prepubescent squeaks, she turns into a charmer once

Higgins has taken her in hand, and makes a seriously transition from broad comedy to the witter goings-on at the disastrously funny tea party, notably in the social abuse the unfortunate relative who might have been done in for a hot pie, but alone a hat! Looking quite stunning she reaches full adult status after the successful Ambassador's Ball, in her self-assertion toward Henry Higgins, whom in human terms she has now left far behind.

Higgins, who has always been rather debetant, especially in the film versions, is played by Raymond Davies as a more self-controlled and petulant bachelor, which fits in much better with the facts we know about his inability to form adult relationships.

There is no attempt to be realistic about the rest of the characters — they are quite simply excellent. Margaret Ford is the kind, no-nonsense housekeeper Mrs. Pearce, James Beattie gentle and conservative as the Colonel Pickens who calls Eliza "Miss Doolittle" and thereby stuns her off on the road to self-discovery. Neville Todd dominates the stage with his genuinely philosophic Alfred Doolittle, and Pat Skerrowen manages to suggest humane goodness under a stingy and coolly ironic exterior as Henry Higgins' fashionably dressed man.

Clothes, in fact were applauded enthusiastically, as also the sets, when assembled during scene changes were accepted as a sort of stage-show by an appreciative audience.

Oklaoma, by contrast, does not live to well. Presenting it at the show-piece His Majesty's Theatre confers a spurious seal of quality that it does not really deserve.

The choreography, despite some suggestions from earlier *Oklaoma* productions, is repetitive and unimaginative, the ensemble work is clumsy, chorus and orchestra occasionally losing each other, and in at least one of the great comedy numbers the witty lyrics were inaudible even if one knew them by heart.

Stylistically and vocally Caroline McKean as Ann Effer and Rosemary Harrison as Ada Anne were the only members of the cast who really knew how to handle the genre, Eliza Ford as Lacey was a pleasure to hear and James Beattie as Carly a pleasure to watch through is honest, his voice is pleasant, though at present too slight. John Harrison, as Judd Pyle, was most impressive, and the "Poor Judd is Dead" number turned out to be one of the highlights of the show.

Nothing remarkably hummable

VENUS STREET

TRAITORS

TOM DIGHT AND THE SPRAGGITS OF SPROON

by Cliff Gilman

From Street by Denis Gallagher, played from 4 to 6 by Waite Davidson, Waite Theatre, Fremantle WA, opened Sept. 1991.

Director: Ross Cook, **Designer:** Jeff Hocking, **Music:** Denis Gallagher, **Lighting:** Keith Edwards, **Choreographer:** Peter White, **Stage Manager:** Sandra Scherwin.

Cast: Dale Roberts, Michael Graham, Nick Frost, Marcela Salinas, Wayne Jackson, Grant Gifford, Carol Adams, Jenny Taylor, Sue Park, Glenn Smith, Peter Adams, Graham Taylor, Roger Van Driel, William Kerr, Angel, Maria Topp. *(Professionals)*

Designs by Sophie Lewis, Play in The Wall Theatre, Fremantle, WA, opened Sept. 1991.

Director: Edgar McNally, **Designer:** Helen Gaudin, **Stage Manager:** Helen Gaudin.

Cast: Anne Gillian Leeming, Elizabeth Allen Piper, Martha Delmonico, Sharon Kershaw, Joseph Weber, Andy King, Anne, Sharon Kershaw, Bruce Brown, David, Christine, Edgar McNally, Gerald, Patricia, Michael Van Buren and Allen Piper. *(Professionals)*

Tom Dight and the Spraggits of Sproon by Tony Nichols and Company, Theatrical Company, WA Theatre, WA, opened Sept. 1991.

Director: Tony Nichols, **Stage Manager:** Ben Stappard.

Cast: Alan Chapman, Debra Decker, Amy Grant, Tracy Jack, Jenny Kearney, Sarah Kinn, Kate Macgregor, Ian McRae, Barbara Richards, Michael Smith and Simon Woodford.

The launching of any new theatre company is always attended by some uncertainty and nagging. With the company offer challenging plays? Will it find adequate performers? Will it cope with the financial pressures which mark on independent theatre companies such a bad business risk?

Fremantle's new Waite Theatre, launched by director Ross Cook, proved with its first three plays almost to be a winner on at least the first two counts. We've been offered a very fine production of Dan Fo's

review

Accidental Death of an Anarchist and a challenging, if less unqualified successful, all-female version of Errol Sroy's *The Choir*. The third and last offering was a new musical *Fences Street*, penned by Perth writer (and former actress) Wanda Davidson, with music and lyrics by Dennis Follington. Ms Davidson's exploration of bohemian low-life, intertwining aspiring singers and actors with prostitutes, undercover cops and bikies, opened with a stunning first scene and continued to engage with concise characterisation and slick plotting throughout Act 1. The second act was less satisfying, with relationships left undeveloped and a somewhat perfunctory plot resolution.

Dennis Follington's score was fairly successful — in command enough of various musical styles (slow-weep, hard rock, a sort of rock-Corrad, torch-ballads et al) to allow for some well-performed numbers, but there was nothing musically, that really struck, no memorable hooks, nothing remarkably humable.

Ross Cox's crisp direction epitomised a cast of youthful and talented performers, among whom Jonas Vukic, Denise Kirby, Grant Cotterell and William Kerr scored points for both singing and acting, while Glenn Sault's portrayal of an undercover cop stood out as an intelligent, finely observed piece of acting.

Fences Street will never open on Broadway, but the production did offer evidence that Melbourne threatens to be a writer of real consequence and that the Winter Theatre is a very valuable addition to West Australian Theatre. May they thrive.

More Australian writing at the Holten-the Wall, this time "afterword" Stephen Sewell's powerful piece on the growth of (and the traumas inflicted on) the committed communist's psyche by Stalinism. In a sense Sewell follows Louis Nowra into that exciting area of historical-ideological drama located in non-Australian contexts which Nowra so successfully opened up with his *Seven Pains*, but while Nowra edged into the surreal, Sewell stays with the brutally real. *Traveller* impresses most with Sewell's deft handling of historical material. The cruel jockeying for Party power after Lenin's death, the cunning deployed by Stalin as he outmanoeuvred and eventually, with the aid of the expanded CHERA, crushed the Trotskyist opposition is clearly and



Stephen Sewell (*Traveller*) in *Traveller* at the Winter Theatre.

WA

swiftly outlined by the device of bringing together (as losers in a world of expanding paranoia) the CHERA agent Kravon and the Trotskyist intellectual feminist Anna in the context of the various power-struggles of the late 20s.

Humana and contemporane in his view of the people caught up by and pounded to dust in these struggles, unfolding in his confrontation with the fact of the Revolution-Gone-Wrong, and witness his recognition of the pressures of being Russian brought to bear on partly Revolutionary ideals (the play is bracketed by a prologue epilogue set during the latter, early-warrior stages of the Nazi offensive into the Russian hinterland in World War II), Sewell has written a play which deserves, and got, in Edgar Mitchell's fine production, committed performance.

In a fine cast Gillian Lymburg (Anna) and Bernice Davis (Kravon) gave strong, intelligently studied performances. As the shrewd opportunist on the rise in CHERA, Lebeshev, Edgar Mitchell was superb. Anna Roper, as Ekaterina, did not quite achieve the very difficult transition demanded by the role (from naive peasant schoolgirl to committed revolutionary and partisan guerrilla) but nevertheless worked hard in the service of the play, while Gerald Hitchcock (killing in an only one day's notice, for the injured Andy Kirby did some good work in the part of Ruben).

Published as unique "non-event" theatre, "The Theatre of the Impossible", and devoted specifically in this international Year of the Disabled as an exercise in theatre for the non-sighted, Theatreperson's Tony Dyer and the *Springers of Ipswich* (WAIT) behind the porous success threatened by the publicity and turned out to be a fine, light-hearted romp. The blindfolded audience was treated essentially to a radio play performed live and by numerous voices at work on a script concocted by the Company and director Tony Nickolls (from an untidy riot of 20-5 scraps, Goshawk sound effects, multiple very old jokes and some excruciatingly bad puns: this usual experience was supplemented by some olfactory cues (garlic, sheep perfume, anasthetics, etc) and some tactile cues (scratching flying birds, scratching pythons and affectionate plant patting). The nerve and enthusiasm of the large student cast filled the tone comedy of the script and we all had a good time. For once in our life-hand speaker: is that all? And why aren't there any blind people here tonight?

THEATRE *guide*

VIC

AUSTRALIAN NOUVEAU THEATRE

Antith (039933533). *Mesmerique Too* devised and directed by Jim Hughes. Theatre of dance and images. To Oct 11. *The World and Some Peacocks* by Barney Lewis, director, Greg Carter. Starts Oct 22.

Downstairs Late Show 11pm. *Pour un Air avec le Jugement du Dieu* by French Director, Jean-Pierre Mignot. Simon and Mervyn Hamisch. Starring Throughout Oct. *Play by Play*, with David Tolley. An Art Music performance piece. Oct 21-25.

Play Reading: The Cenci of Venice by Bill Marshall. Oct 16.

AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (0477133)

Fright Theatre: Bedbug Celebration by John Baly, director, Richard Murphett, with Regina Galeas and William Zeppe. Music by Ned Symonds of Skyhooks. To Oct 10.

ARTS COUNCIL OF VICTORIA (0394355)

Playbox Theatre: Same Time Next Year, director, Don Mackay, with Kathy Child and Peter Adams. Amusing two-hander comedy about an annual affair. To Oct 7.

BALLARAT THEATRE WORKSHOPS (053/314816)

Spouse by Peter Shaffer, director, Bruce T Widdow, designer, Robert MacGowan. Shaffer's galloping success that outstripped them all. To Oct 13.

BANANA LOUNGE COMEDY ROOM (4193669)

A succession of the best of Melbourne's underground comedy. Late shows, Fri and Sat.

COMEDY CAFE THEATRE BYO RESTAURANT (4126965)

Carnival Knowledge written and presented by Peter Moon, Ila McAdams and Eddy Zarembeg. Throughout Oct.

COMEDY THEATRE (0392533)

Chicago by Bob Fosse and Fred Ebb, musical arrangement by John Kander. Sydney Theatre Company production, director, Richard Wherrett, with Nancye Hayes, Geraldine Turner, Terry Donovan and George Spentis. Smash-hit musical about corruption and media hype in the thirties. Throughout Oct.

CROSSWINDS COMMUNITY THEATRE (057/623366)

Stranger Than Superman by Roy Kift, director, Mick Carter. Performed by Crosswinds in conjunction with Bouvarie St TIE Team. To Oct 23.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (0433211)

Thayne Playing Our Song by Neil Simon and Marvin Hamlisch. Starring Jacki Weaver and John Waters. Popular two-hander musical comedy returns. Starts Oct 23.

LAST LAUGH THEATRE RESTAURANT (4196326)

Downstairs: Fairground Snaps, director, Terry O'Connell, with Mick Conroy. Throughout Oct. *Upstairs: Shows changing weekly*. MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY (0544500)

Athenaeum Theatre: Amadeus by Peter Shaffer, director, John Sumner, designer, Anne Preser, musical arrangement by Helen Gifford, with Bruce Mylles and Fred Parlow. A controversial portrayal of Mozart in Shaffer's latest popular sledge in belly and inspiration. Starts Oct 14.

Russell Street Theatre: The Truce by Sandy McCutcheon, director, Ray Lawler, designer, John Cervenka. Throughout Oct. *Athenaeum 2: Beecham* by Caryl Brahams and Ned Sherrin, director, Ron Rodger, designer, Christopher Smith. Starts Oct 12.

MILL THEATRE COMPANY (052/323318)

Mill Night: On The Theme of Nutrition. Oct 22. Mill Club for children, Sat. mornings. Folk Dance workshops with Faye McInden. Throughout Oct.

PLAYBOX THEATRE COMPANY (034888)

Downstairs: The Marlonette Theatre of Australia's production of General MacArthur in Australia by Roger Pavers, director, Richard Radehow. Starts Oct 21.

Upstairs: A Night in the Arms of Reileen by Glen Gorman, director, Carolla Gartner, designer, Anne French, with John Larking, John Wood, Ron Chalmer and Sue Jones. New Aus play from this year's Playwright's conference. Starts Oct 8 for 3 weeks.

UNIVERSAL THEATRE (4193777)
Squirts, a political revue by Benny

Oakley, David Williamson, John Romani, Steven Sawell, Patrick Cook, Tim Robertson, David Allen and Steve Wipard, with Max Gillies. Looks at the games played in the world of power politics in general and the Liberal Party in particular. Throughout Oct. For entries contact Corrie Kramer on 6619448.



NSW

ARTS COUNCIL OF NSW (367 6611)

Adult Tours: Travelling North by David Williamson. A Queensland Theatre Company production. Some say Williamson's best play — about love in old age and city/country differences. Runs to Oct 10.

ENSEMBLE THEATRE (025 6677)

The Elephant Man by Bernard Pomerance, director, Hayes Gordon, designer, Shaun Gorton. Internationally successful drama of hideously deformed John Merrick and his acceptance in Victorian society. Throughout Oct.

FRANK STRAIN'S BULL 'N BUSH THEATRE RESTAURANT (367 4637)

Rehearsed to Hollywood, director, Frank Strain, musical director, Julie Symonds. Throughout Oct.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (212 3411)

Evie by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, director, Harold Prince, with Karen O'Neill, Peter Carroll, John O'May and Peter Styles. One of the biggest and most successful musicals ever. Throughout Oct.

HUNTER VALLEY THEATRE COMPANY, NEWCASTLE (049 28 2528)

Phone theatre for details.

KIRKIBILLI PUB THEATRE (92 1415)

The Private Eye Show by Perry Quinlan and Paul Chubb, with Zoe Bentham. Starts Oct 10.

MARIAN STREET THEATRE (488 3186)

The Shining Heart by Richard Beynon, director, John Krynkelet, with Tom Farley, Phillip Baker, Syd Haylen and Joanne Lockwood. One of the first of the new Australian dramas, but rarely revived, unlike *The Doll* and *One Day of the Year*. Oct 12. *Once Upon A Madras*, music by Mery Rodgers, lyrics by Marshall Sauer, director, John Milson. Based on the tale of the princess and the pea. Starts Oct 23. *MARIONETTE THEATRE (23 3817)* *Stables Theatre: Megalomania* by Geoff Kelso. Adult comic puppet show with Geoff Kelso. To Oct 4. *MUSIC LOFT THEATRE (877 8585)* *Pardon Our Privates*, director, Peggy Mortimer, with Ron Fraser. Through-out Oct.

NEW THEATRE (519 3433)

On The Walkby by Nick Enright, director, Frank Barnes. Nick Enright's very successful documentary/musical on the depression years in SA. Throughout Oct.

NIMROD THEATRE (828 5003)

Upstairs: Last Day In Woodstock by Ron Blair, director, John Bell, with Pat Brisson, Les Dayman, Peter Collingwood, Ron Falk, Stuart Campbell and Robert Alexander. Blair's black comedy about Sydney urban development. Starts Oct 7. *Overstays: Ambell* by Alison Lyssa, director, Chris Johnson. Allegorical feminist play about social stereotypes and lesbian custody. Into Oct.

PHILLIP STREET THEATRE (232 8376)

Blood of the Lamb by Bruce Mason, A Court Theatre, Christchurch NZ production about a lesbian couple and their "daughter".

PLAYERS THEATRE COMPANY (39 7311)

Bondi Pavilion Theatre: The Corn Is Green by Enlyn Williams, director, Dorcas Harrop. Starts Oct 29. *Stories From Around The World* translated



and written by Mark Scrim from folk tales. Saturday mornings throughout Oct.

Q THEATRE (047 21 5735)

Buried Child by Sam Shepard, director Richard Brooks. Bankstown, Oct 7-10 and Orange, Oct 13-17. *STUDIO SYDNEY (771 3333)* *Wayide Chapel: I Sent A Letter To My Love* by Bernice Rubens, director Graham Corry, with Lela Blake and Ross Sharp. Movingly written story of love and frustration in a Welsh village. Into Oct.

REGENT THEATRE (264 7666)

An Evening's Intercourse with Barry Humphries. Return of the latest Dame Edna et al showcase. Oct 5-24.

SHOPFRONT THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (588 2548)

Free drama workshops on weekends, includes playbuilding, mime, dance, puppetry, design, radio and video. Youth Theatre Showcase. ATYP in 1988 based on George Orwell, director, Jane Westbrook. Oct 2-3. *The 21st 5 Theatre* production of *I Heard They Did It For Kicks*, director, Benney Langford. Oct 9-10. *The Perfect Romeo and Juliet* adapted from William Shakespeare by Shopfront Theatre, director, Kingston Anderson. Oct 15-17, 23-24 and 30-31.

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY (358 4395)

Drama Theatre, SOH (20588) *Car On A Hot Tin Roof* by Tennessee Williams, director, Richard Wharmett, designer, Ian Robinson, with Wendy Hughes, John Hargreaves and Ron Haddock. Typically fine Tennessee Williams drama, with star cast. To Oct 31.

THEATRE ROYAL (231 6111)

The Rocky Horror Show by Richard O'Brien, director, David Togun, designer, Brian Thomads, with Daniel Albari. Revival of the now cult, sci-fi, rock musical. Starts Oct 6.

For entries contact Carole Long on 357 1200/509 2010.

QLD

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (231 2777)

Not Now Darling starring Lesle Phillips and Andrew Sachs. British sex farce. To Oct 10.

LA BOUTE THEATRE (36 1822)

No Room For Dreamers by George Hutchinson, director, Bruce Parr. Light-hearted yarn about William Gaudy, eccentric idealist and soapbox orator of the early 1900's. To Oct 17.

Mary Barnes by David Edgar, director, Malcolm Blacklock. The absorbing, true story of a schizophrenic cured in an "experimental" psychiatric experiment and a political essay on the hopes and ideals of the '60s. Starts Oct 23.

QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY (231 3881)

Albert Park: As You Like It by William Shakespeare, director, John Tasker, designer, James Rodwood. Adventurous, open-air staging of one of Shakespeare's most popular comedies. To Oct 10. *Edward Street Theatre, New Sky — A Tengeri Production: Mine and mask* specialist Judith Anderson in her long-awaited, one-woman show: an immigrant, her journey of discovery in a new life under a strange new sky. Oct 14-31.

THE TN COMPANY

Edward Street Theatre (bookings 352 5133). *The Dads* by Eric Pilaysh, director, Bryn Mason. Intriguing play laced with black humor. Fruits of TN's Annual Playwrights Project. To Oct 3.

TOOWOOMBA ARTS THEATRE (575 36 1008)

Studio 8: The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie by Jay Presson Allen, director, Robert Kelton. Adapted from Muriel Spark's novel. An unorthodox school teacher encourages her pupils to achieve the

stuffy conventions of pre-war Scotland. Oct 12-17
For entries contact Jeremy Ridge-
man on 377 2519.

SA

THE STAGE COMPANY (333 6383)

King Lear by William Shakespears, director, Brian Debnam, with Wayne Bell, Deborah Little, John Heywood, David Hursthouse, Peter Crossley and Robin Harrison. Shakespears greatest tragedy about human frailty and pride. To Oct 10
STATE THEATRE COMPANY (515151)

Playhouse: The Revenger's Tragedy by Cyril Toumeur, director, Richard Cottrell, with Geoffrey Rush, Dennis Olsen, Kevin Miles, Simon Burke, Phillip Quast, Stuart McCreery, Marilyn Allen and Wendy Strehlow. One of the greatest Jacobean tragedies, the play is an entangled web of lust, incest, rape, infanticide, adultery, mutual suspicion, hate and bloodshed. To Oct 10
Price Theatre, CPA, Fenshen by David Hare, director, Ken Boucher. The story of the struggle of the Chinese village of Long Bow, set in 1945 against the backdrop of the final battles of the Red Army Kuomintang. Starts Oct 14

No End of Blame by Howard Barker, director, John Gaden, with Robert Grubb, Alexander Hry, Deborah Kennedy and Geoffrey Rush. A cartoonists pursuit of truth and morality in art, set in 1915 crowds, Hungary, Russia and England. Starts Oct 16

Maggie Theatre at the Playhouse: Accidently Yours. A play for children about safety in the home. One Up My Sisters. A play about mathematics. Director, Malcolm Moore. Oct 29-31

TROIKA THEATRE-IN-EDUCATION (31 0101)
The Space: Fred's Shed. A fantasy for children aged 5 to 7. Oct 27-31. For entries contact John Geoffrey on 267 5988

TAS
POLYGON THEATRE (34 8018)
Sesatepe by Edward Albee, director,

Don Gay, with Hazel Alger, Allen Harvey and Norman Le Moine. A bored couple discuss their life as they sit on a beach, there is clearly no genuine connection between them. Hobart, Oct 14-17 and 21-24. Touring Flinders Island, Oct 26, King Island, Oct 29 and Devonport, Oct 30, 31

SALAMANCA THEATRE COMPANY (33 5268)

King Lear by William Shakespears, director, Richard Dawey. A Salamanca Theatre Company production. Oct 22-24.

For entries contact Ely Kamal on (02) 29 1818

ACT

AMU ARTS CENTRE (494767/493726)

The Wizard of Oz. Presented by the Canberra Church of England Girls Grammar School. Oct 8, 9, 10

CANBERRA THEATRE CENTRE

Playhouse: (494 660): Did Tomax by Harold Pinter. A Fortune Theatre Company production. First production by new Artistic Director, George Whaley of one of Pinter's best three-handers. Oct 2-17

JESSEY THEATRE COMPANY

Hum. A TIE program for pre-schools, director, Graeme Broonan. *War of the Words* by Graham Potts. A TIE program for primary schools, director, Graeme Broonan. Performances in schools throughout third term.

PITS (PUE IN THE SKY)

Rex Hotel (48 5211). *The Naked Hour Show*. A theatre-and-bar production by David Bates and Jos Woodward. Supper available, pre-show meals can be arranged. Throughout Oct.

THEATRE THREE (474232)

Bedroom Farce by Alan Ayckbourn. A Repertory production by Pamela Rosenberg. One of Ayckbourn's less brilliant comedies, but nonetheless popular. To Oct 10. *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne, director, Marnie Redpath. A TAP production. The first of the British "kitchen sink" dramas and still going strong. Oct 4-17

For entries contact Janet Hesley on 492668 (w) or 499807 (h).

WA

HAYMAN THEATRE (3507028)

Wait. Premise of a play yet untitled original comedy by Phil Thompson and Theatre Go Round. A West Australian Theatre Company production. Oct 21-31

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE (3216288)

The Dresser by Ronald Harwood, director, Rodney Fisher, with Warren Mitchell and Gordon Chater. Superb performances from Mitchell and Chater in this popular drama of backstage WW2 rep theatre and its characters. To Oct 10.

HOLE IN THE WALL THEATRE (3613493)

Upside Down at the Bottom of the World by David Allen. Play recalling the loving, laughing and lying of DH Lawrence and Frieda. Oct 8-31. *Late Night: Literary Lunatics*, director, Ken Campbell Dobbe. Poetry elevated from page to stage — from the pens of Auden, Ayres, Carroll and others. Oct 15-31, 10.45pm.

NATIONAL THEATRE COMPANY (3253500)

Playhouse: Soterly Feelings by Alan Ayckbourn, director, Edgar Melicoff. Ayckbourn's latest extremely funny look at middle-class mores. He has written four different outcomes, permutations depending on an on-stage toss of a coin. Throughout Oct

SPARE PARTS — PUPPET ARTS THEATRE (3333333)

Touring Metropolitan schools with *Masked*. Performed by Peter Wilson and Ian Tregoning.

For entries contact Margaret Schwan on 3411178

NT

DARWIN THEATRE GROUP (818552)

Moving On, Moving On... by Simon Hopkinson. Starting a Top End tour on Oct 8 at Grosjean Elyand and then touring to centres before the Darwin season of Oct 20-31. A moving comedy about two women in their thirties on a coach tour through the Territory.

FILM info

BIGGER PIGGIES

How about these two pigs now being groomed for stardom? Kenneth Cook's novel *Pig* was asking to be filmed, but the difficulty was one of casting — a giant duffelcoat was one thing, a coat made out from the paddock or something made out from foam rubber, a kind of Moby Pig. Then along comes master pig looking for an audience, called Rancorback from a radio-unpublished novel by a prominent named Peter Brennan. The producer Reed Appleby hopes to bring Cook's pig in for \$1.5 million while the producer Neil Mackinnon thinks in budget terms of \$2.5 million. A bigger pig, um. The human heroes will be in one case an environmental scientist and in the other an advertising man.

GOOD RETURNS

Charmie Raye was in Australia with her husband James Mason while he made *The Morning After* on location in the Blue Mountains of NSW, but nobody offered her any work in rings, screen or television, which seems a great waste of talent. She thanks Australia never did appreciate her, and she may be right. Melissa Butler is another one who left the industry (for hours) but returned recently for a bit in *Swarmail*. . . Who could help wondering how the Americans will get their tongues around *Gullipoli*? *Gully-polly*? The film has done everything to and for the home office since it opened, confirming copy-right at the end of August with Peter Weir and his stars, Mel Gibson and Mark Lee, on hand to celebrate.

Contributing Editor:
Elizabeth Riddell

HOME GROWN
GAUCHERIE

Gaucherie prevailed in the presentation of the Australian Film and Television of the Americas, or Sacramento, but at least the gaucherie was homegrown and not imported from Hollywood. The local trust is easier to take. The acceptance to present nationwide Barry Crocker having studied Johnny Carson was hard to understand the materials was hard to understand the materials, splendidly, laudably and respectably well-mannered, displayed occasional aspects mixed with genuine sweetness. For this chief, much thanks. An emotional moment with the great East Lorraine was a bonus. Best with thanks. Michael Parkinson looked better than he does on that terrible set at Channel 9. But where is the well-groomed, sparkling, renowned, amiable Party of the BBC? Something to do with the lights perhaps, or the wrong shampoo.

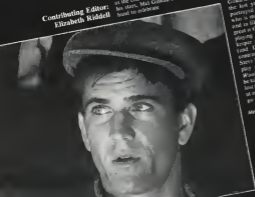
RULES OF THE GAME

Action are developing a new, rather special set of telephone novels, occasioned by the ring that comes the night before shooting is to start. The voice at the other end says, "Garry, don't forget tomorrow, we still haven't got the money." By the time you read this, Mr Hornsby may have been persuaded to vary the rules in the press and common sense.

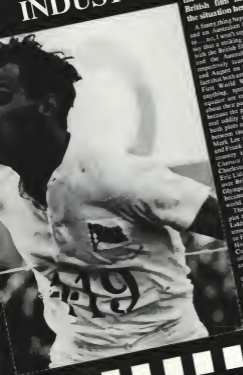
JUDY FOR GOLDA

Judy Davis is to play the young Golda Meir in the four-part TV documentary by Paramount, and the role of the last great Israeli premier. Ingrid Bergman is to play Golda in middle life, and the story was that the last years of her career were to be portrayed by Pat Evanson, the NZ actress who is more often in Australia, on stage and in films, than in her own country. From great is the demand for her services. From playing Susan, the grandmotherly publisher in *Swarmail* for Gill Armstrong, to lead David Ellich, who according to contract is not permitted on the set) and Steve McLean, she went into Ross Mac's play at the "Forum, The Last Days of Woodstock. The Golda role need not be taken as an indication that Judy is to be lost to Australia. The girl who spent a year last regional Festival's Q Theatre will simply go where the good scripts are.

Mel Gibson (*Frankie*) in Peter Weir's *Caliph*
Ben Cross as David Abrahamson
Chastin of *For*



MOVING AWAY WITH THE INDUSTRY



The Canadian film industry has shown that boom and bust can happen simultaneously. ELIZABETH RIDDELL contrasts that experience and the "renaissance" of the British film industry with the situation here.

feature

A funny thing happened to a British and an Australian film on their way to... no, I won't say that. I will simply say that a striking coincidence occurs with the British film *Chariots of Fire* and the Australian film *Gallipoli*, respectively launched in September and August on local audiences. The fact that both are set in the period of the First World War does not signify anything, since both sides of the equator are enjoying being nostalgic about their past — perhaps, some say, because the present is so bleak. The real oddity about these films is that both plots are pivoted on a foot race between the two heroes. In *Gallipoli* Mark Lee and Mel Gibson as Archie and Frank run against one another in a country town for a cash prize; in *Chariots of Fire* Ben Cross and Ian Charleson as Harold Abrahams and Eric Liddell run against each other at the Olympics in Paris in 1924. They became the two fastest men in the world.

The most marked difference in the plot treatment is that Abrahams and Liddell are not rivals in any genuine sense. If Abrahams is seen as a parallel to Frank, he lacks Frank's malice. His chip was about being a Jew at Cambridge, and about the Olympic officials banning his coach from the arena.

Coincidence apart, there are more than a few handy links to be picked up by the Australian industry as it plunges forward into 1982, and one of them reinforces the belief of the serious people in the business that they should do what they know how to do, with the best writers and directors working at the national rather than the international

which are by no means the same thing. The themes of *Gallipoli* and *Breaker Morant* — courage, competitiveness, friendship, adventure, individual emotions and emotions and events mirror the larger world. The audience can identify, participate, admire, regret.

The old argument, before *Gallipoli* (and before *Peter and Margaret* and *My Brilliant Career* and *Casbah* and *Breaker Morant*) was that Australian subjects become not even Australian will go so there, so how could overseas audiences be persuaded, when they could not even understand the language, language meaning.

There is now a good deal of similarity between the British and Australian film-making scene. For some years the British have been used as a resource by the Americans, particularly as translators of special effects. Films were made by Nicholas Ray, etc. with effect so much that a film industry. Then David Putnam appeared, to write *The Drowning* with a mixed Atlantic cast and a director who had never made anything but commercials. He was wanted off to Hollywood to make *Melodrama* and briefly a film that was coming to grief but actually to have a look at the scene. Then he returned to take a chance on another director of commercials and documentaries, Hugh Hudson, for *Clara*.

Simultaneously with the release here of *Chorino* another film has surfaced in Britain, Gregory's *Corby* a 13-year-old water-steady named Bill Forsyth. It was people nobody ever heard of and in a comedy, and it has taken Britain by storm, or at least London where it opened in three cinemas.

The budget was what amounts to 1,000,000 Australian, mostly from the British Film Institute and Scottish Television. His second-from-now production will be with David Putnam, *People vs. Charisma* and Gregory's *Corby* as signalling the resurgence of the British film industry. It will have something to do with the comic strip simpsons of blackbatters.

If Britain is about to emerge from the north, Australia is, a concerned producer tells me, in a very grave state. The terms of the last shelter do not work for they do not work for Canada in the late 1970s, when the slogan was "Any movies do" and half a dozen films have stopped dead in their tracks. At least in Australia, films put up for public, if only for a week. In Canada the films of which the public was totally ignorant.

Montreal became Hollywood North, with 5250 millions of mostly American money poured into 130 films over three years under the "Canadian content" agreement which meant a Canadian born star was all that was necessary. Australia could become North America, they say, what become and build simultaneously.

Informed people argued for a long time for the Government, any Government, to give them a film industry. Now they have it, it would be foolish to use it to make standard (not good, just standard) Hollywood films. The first deal (promised in the October Prime Minister talked first Australian films were getting more space in newspapers abroad than Australian politicians (it would be hard to get lost). Transverse investment money has almost dried up. Hence the "prime minister" mentioned by the producer, whose own track record is good. After all, it took *Gallipoli* from 1974 to get off the ground.



Matt Carroll and Myl Suckling in the dramatic comedy "Breaker Morant" in Gallipoli.



Matt Carroll, producer of *Breaker Morant*, is quoted as being against the internationalizing of Australian film on the grounds that it will simply be "Australianism" of the film that have been successful overseas. Regarding success with critical acclaim and good box office in art, and somewhat bigger than art, cinema such as *Morant*, *Peter*, *My Brilliant Career*, *Casbah*, and now *Gallipoli*. *Gallipoli* is done on a large canvas, larger than that of *Chorino*, but it couldn't, as they say, be more indigenous. That's the word, my concerned producer says, we have no watch.

Joe Chappelle's *Love, Talk & Sex* Channel 4M
Fest

Kostas — commendable attempt



Wendy Hughes and Peter Hummel in
Kostas.

by Elisabeth Riddell

The local industry has avoided the vexed subject of differences that arise between the native born and immigrants, and who could blame it when it has no easy other difficulties to overcome? *Kostas* is a cold, understated film, with an exception, and in any case the problems there arise in the Greek and Kosovian that find themselves in the midst of a marriage between them. So Paul Cox is to be commended for his attempt to look the subject squarely in the face. *Kostas* is a film about a middle-class, Melbourne, thirtyish woman, an art gallery director with a child and no visible husband, who falls into love and tries but fails to make a living.

He is a refugee from the Colonists' beatable, a richer and more lively in lodgings kept by a frugal pair of Australians, married rather than supported by coverts with a milk bar, almost irrelevant, cheerful only when in Greek restaurants where he can dance to music, dance, and break some glass when celebration is called for.

He picks Carol up at the airport, presents his claims to attention, has a superficial success and then her, only to resign her in an unlikely reconciliation (at the airport again) as he is about to leave to attend his mother's funeral in his Greek village.

Up until then the film is credible enough, mainly due to the performance of Taki Ekmekci as Kostas. It calls for respect and sympathy, and is several light years ahead, in an artistic sense, of his work in *Code*. His passion for Carol, played convincingly by Wendy Hughes, is true with other people and appears to be pouring down in his awkward manner. Carol is selfish, trendy, ashamed of being a Greek, a Greek, but ashamed of being his obsessive devotion — when a row with her mother flying and rude words, comes. This is a good, good movie, triggered by Chris Haywood at his most generous. Mandell seems amazingly dodging the action.

It is hard to take the airport reconciliation seriously. The inference is that Kostas will return and that he and Carol will live happily ever after, but why should they? The factors that separated them are still there.

Wendy Hughes' lethargic performance even when she goes to blow across a lounge at Taki's mother it seems to be in a slow motion, like a cigarette commercial in a real sense. This is all the more noticeable when Chris Haywood appears for a moment or two, and then every thing up.

The film was produced by Bernard Fiddly and directed by Paul Cox, screen play by Linda Aronson from an idea by Paul Cox.

review

review

Franklin, and to be based on fact. Thus if a real occurrence in a real process is shown to conflict with, while on the record, sections of a given existing trial, pretends to be blind to concealing, then only one can be blind to concealing. Another have any, ing and a magazine. Another have any, dants show its disability. The magazine, physics and a specialist from outside as well as a clergyman and two who are present visitors. The events that lead up to, though the magazine show him as a prob- looking and innocent, though fault-finding trial to whom women are irretrievably attracted. He has two old parents and a new sister who wishes he would go straight, but knows he won't.

The faded blindman is the guest of the story and, as can be seen, it is pretty tedious. There is more to blindman than wearing nightgown, making for dark glasses and acquiring a stove dish. The latter is rather funny, a lumpy little holding three ways into a meal before. Anyway, for the sake of the film his play comes off, and Martin Bang is not very speaking towards Sydney in a white car reads for the most part.

It isn't all music and dancing. The Martis' wife, Sarah, talks in love with Marvin's white hound dog in a place of scores after church, and persuades the author to let her go on posters with herself, her husband and their two children. She confesses that her husband does not pay much attention. While he and the children are off looking for hawks, Sarah and Sarah enjoy a little affection.

Marion discovers what others have before her, that smoking leads to a religious woman in dangerous like with confessions not only to God but to her husband as well.

That Ralph the husband forgives Marion after a short display of temper, and both husband and wife suggest that Marion should tell all to the authorities. Two characters with not, to come a phrase, did

As the credits come up, somebody has much of a better, although there has temporarily paid off. One would not care to be foolish, but with her resources, her weekly place of work, and the knowledge that Ralph holds all the cards.

The plot of *Shogun* is full of holes, and much of the action based on false assumptions. Why would the British, Marten be humiliated to find that his father had been beaten up by police after Marten's escape from his parents' house? He would know they would take their revenge, however ineptly. Why should Ralph protect him, even if heath don't show special bias, he would be treated about the same? Apart from that, why should one of the doctors be a foreigner who has to use an interpreter during his diagnosis? Can you use the phrase *interpreter* standing for anything?

The dialogue is so graceful on her as to be at an average level, and even Judy Davis, who plays Sarah, says she talks with it. Her grammar, punctuation, wit—oh, Sarah is almost infallible, but Thomas Miller looks too over-the-top for his role as Ralph. John Warshawski is all right as Martin Wong, however. Sandy, a born loser who was turned on a winner. There are a few good scenes, notably one in which police invade a hospital Martin is sharing with Ivey, played by Wendy Wagner. Some of the music comes from the last, but several spots miss the mark, such as "I Wanna Dance with Somebody" as the film's emphasis is on

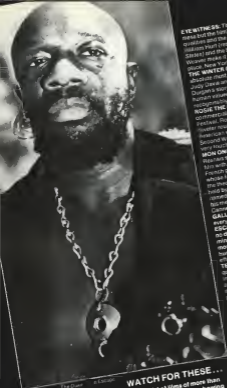
Much of the film's emphasis is on Martin's extreme body-consciousness, with Lucy, a girl named Martin played by Kim Deacon and Sarah Ligonjola. However, Deacon and Ligonjola do not seem to be taken cinematographically, but rather as a vehicle to solve the problems of the naked female body. When photographing her, women they wanted to make the neck, upper arms, and human back ugly and unsightly. That, or the ladies are too self-conscious to display themselves gracefully. In either case, practice may make perfect. It can't be too soon.

The performances vary from subtle to gaudy, rather according to the director's strengths. Truly Judy Davis and Liam Neeson, for her first romantic role, speak really true about a first-time parent I can't identify, the film leaves a rather nasty taste in the mouth.

It was produced by Peter Oliver and Henry Walker and directed by Claude Whatham, with a screenplay by Ivan Greenwell and photographed by John Smiler. The *S&W* film Commission is the principal investor and the film is being distributed by Hoyts.



John Hargreaves and Peter Hargreaves of
Hargreaves



Hustle Player
From both 1993

The Duke

A Lacage

WATCH FOR THESE . . .

A short list of films of more than usual interest, currently showing around Australia . . .

LACAGE AUX POLES: It's quite a lot usually awful, but this one really is the product of the first and actually gives the actors more range and gets the two charming middle-aged homosexuals out into the straight world

EYEWITNESS: The plot is a bit of a mess but the film's entertaining qualities and the performances of Melissa Hunt (rescued from *Altered States*) and the beguiling Sigourney Weaver make it worth a visit. The place, New York

THE WINTER OF OUR DREAMS: An absolute must for several reasons — Judy Davis and Bryan Brown, John Dargatzis's storytelling and direction, human values, its quality of being recognisably Australian

ROSIE THE RIVETER: Came contractual from the June Film Festival. Rosie grew out of a Rose, the riveter heroine of 300 former Rosies. American women workers in the Second World War, relevant and very touching.

MON ONCLE O AMERIQUE: Jean Rochefort's extraordinary and delicate film with Gerard Depardieu and other French players about three characters whose lives intersect, carrying out the themes on human aggression told by a physician and biologist named Henri Labrousse. The bumps are his kids. The film won prizes at Cannes, San Sebastian and Venice

GALLIPOLI: Of course. But by now everybody knows about Gallipoli. **ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK:** There is no doubt about this, it is a horror film, a minute a monster who needs a human, with such de-humanised human very clever sets and special effects

TESS: Hypnotically beautiful. If not quite what Thomas Hardy had in mind in his *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Tess is a heroine, held captive here, victim of men, without seeming to have any power of her own. Francesca Knolly is beautiful and young. If not exactly Tess, and the male performance is splendid

THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE: As somebody said, a very Californian mixture of eye and Gena Cole, with Jack Nicholson suitably scoring as the other Frank and Jessica Lange as Cora, who temporarily fathers him. This is the fourth version of James M Cain's novel of the same name, two of the others being French and Italian, it clearly has a great interest for film makers. This is the steamiest yet

THE CANNONBALL RUN: For those who like more hot metal stuff. Ben Reynolds and a glimpse of Sammy Davis Jr. Dean Cain, Roger Moore and more than a glimpse of Dom DeLuise and Patrick Swayze

guide

OPERA info

Contributing Editor: Justin Macdonnell

NEW DIRECTIONS AT THE CON

Some taking up his appointment at the beginning of this year as head of the Opera School at the NSW Conservatorium, Myer Friedman, formerly of Glyndebourne and more recently the highly successful Music Director of the State Opera of South Australia, has been working quietly behind the scenes to establish a new focus in opera training in Australia.

The overall situation for the teaching of young aspiring singers — both vocally and dramatically — has been described by more than one critic over the years as frankly a mess, with a plethora of institutions and private studios offering a range of courses and individual packages. Since 1968, the NSW "Con" Opera School has provided the only full-time accredited course exclusively in opera studies available in the country, and despite efforts in other states, with governmental cutbacks in educational spending, looks set to remain that way for some time.

Sensibly, and not surprisingly given his personal background as coach and conductor, he has placed vocal attainment and ensemble tuition at the centre of his teaching programme while not neglecting their logical extension into the staged arts.

Veteran producer, Stefan Haug, has been engaged to teach in acting and production and, more recently, Michael Brauchamp, previously resident producer with The Australian Opera and currently associate producer at Glyndebourne, has been brought in to direct the first full scale production for the School — Monteverdi's *The Coronation of Poppea* opening at the Wertheim Hall on October 13.

Hopfully, we shall be looking, in the not too far distant future, at an institution which may in operative terms parallel the crucial role which NIDA has played in steering professional training in theatre generally.

NEW ZEALAND HITS THE RAILS

In a unique spirit of co-operation between opera and a government body, the National Opera of New Zealand recently toured its new production of *The Marriage of Figaro* from Auckland through both islands to Queensland. As a gesture of sponsorship in kind the national railways system transported acts and costumes to each of the four main centres free of charge and were invited as a major supporter of the company. Perhaps if Don Mackinnon

has made the trains run on time, it would be a brave company in Australia that would trust their — now tangible — proposition to any aspect of this country's public transport system.

VOSS AT LAST

After the razzamatazz that preceded the deadly silence that followed Scottsop's *River of Passage* in 1975, Richard Meak's *Pow* based on Patrick White's novel with libretto by David Malouf looks set for a happier and more orderly introduction to the Australian public.

The work, now nearing completion is currently scheduled for premiership by The Australian Opera in 1983. Before then, however, the Adelaide Festival will showcase a 90 to 112 minute version in March next year. Hopefully, the AD will between then and its opening also take the opportunity to involve their performing company and audiences, by seminars and other workshop showings of the piece, more productively in the process of deciphering the contemporary shenanigans than on previous occasions.

HIDDEN SUBSIDY?

Can the Music Board of the Australia Council have been more productive in investing in the state opera companies than its apparently floundering over the past seven years would suggest?

With the engagement of Anthony Jeffrey as consultant and interim titular head of Queensland's embryonic Lyric Opera pending the appointment of a general manager — now being advertised — it brings to three out of five the number of state companies managed by former staff members of the Board.

Ken Forster and Ian Campbell are both erstwhile senior project officers while Jeffrey is the previous director of the Board. In all cases the Australia Council position was their last major administrative role in arts management. Both Victoria and South Australia have flourished under their present incumbents. Jeffrey, more recently concerned with administration of the Australian Opera, with particular responsibility for fund raising, will undoubtedly want to steer the company firmly into a course of support from the private business sector in Queensland.

Meanwhile there is no truth in the rumour that Clive Pascoe is to be the next King of Maatiba.



Myer Friedman, Resident Conductor, Sydney Symphony Orchestra



Michael Brauchamp, Producer, Australian Opera

feature

PETER COOKE, DESIGNER

by Ken Huxley

Where else but in Australia could a designer tackle *Aida*, *Faust*, and *La Traviata* before he's 30?

The rhetorical questioner was Peter Cooke, free-lance designer of operas, of which he has now tackled no fewer than 22. He had returned to Canberra where he went to school and where his mother still lives, to design Botten's *The Turn of the Screw* for Canberra Opera. The venue was the Playhouse, the most intimate opera theatre in the country, with neither a fly tower nor adequate wing space. It was a homecoming in more ways than one.

"This is a special occasion because *The Turn of the Screw* at the Canberra Playhouse was my first opera design. Towards the end of 1974 I was assigned to John Tuckey's production for Canberra Opera's part of my accessible work, in my final year at NIDA," he said.

That production was so visually impressive that sets and costumes as well as producer and designer were bought by New Opera, the predecessor of State Opera, South Australia, and taken to Adelaide. Peter Cooke recalls that the design, expanded for the larger stage at Adelaide's Opera Theatre, took on a heavy look. This time he and producer Brian Bell have striven for something very light that will keep moving with the music. Locations are only suggested, sometimes with deliberate vagueness, inviting the audience to do some imaginative work.

Listening to Peter Cooke talk in sight with one's left is no doubt that stage design is a primary form of theatrical communication. He praises the designs of the Australian Opera's *Aida*, *Ashmore* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, pointing out that theatre companies have been making such designs for ten years past. He rejoices that the seemingly narrow and conservative world of opera is at last catching up.

Why am I sure with theatre, then? Surprisingly it is not easy for Peter Cooke to find a satisfactory answer. He is inclined to understate his innate musicianship, although he does not hide it when stating a preference for Botten's music over that of Gounod's *Faust*. Certainly, his five years after NIDA as student designer at the QTC were happy and fulfilling enough. The basic attraction of theatre expressed through music if obvious is unexplained, in addition, the influence of an opera producer seems to have turned Peter Cooke decisively to opera.

John Thompson, Executive Director of the Queensland Opera Company until its demise last year, was the crucial influence. Thompson clearly displayed tenacity as well as faith in the young designer, the first collaboration, *Coufas Three* for a North Queensland tour, was "indecent". The word is said with a noticeable wince. But a big production of Carmen which followed "got me back on the rails".

"John Thompson has a special place for his encouragement through endless discussions. He is a most aware musicianally, dramatically, and in design values." In 1978 alone Thompson commissioned four operas from Peter Cooke, including *Faust* and *The Magic Flute*, while the young designer was working full-time for the QTC.

There is a tone in the voice that sounds like relief when Peter Cooke admits to spending more time these days over each production. He finds it important to resist the temptation to do more just to earn more money. This year regional opera companies have occupied him with *La Traviata* and *Don Pasquale* for Victoria, and *The Turn of the Screw* plus the coming *Aida* for Canberra. Only the Australian Opera, for whom he designed Scarlatti's *The Triumph of Honour*, has not yet invited him back for a second production.

With already two productions of *Il Trovatore* as well as a two-act *Serenade* behind him, Cooke's enthusiasm is all for the next project, the one opera that he never expects to do a second time, *Aida*. The set model,



Peter Cooke

a work of art in its own right, turned heads every night in the foyer during the August season in Canberra. "The project has captured a community spirit. They'd made over 100 costumes by early August for a mid-December production."

There is no doubt that the designer has the measure of the peculiar strengths of the smallest and least affluent of the regional companies, which has chosen to do the grandest of the standard repertoire operas. "It's a matter of knowing what talent is here. They've given themselves enough time to do it. Anne Brasher-Smith is a tremendous set constructor, and Ellen Blunden's amazing as a production coordinator."

The secret of Peter Cooke's addiction to opera is revealing itself, it is the power and scope of the teamwork. "For this production, in a sense bigger than the Opera House concert hall, the logistics will be more difficult than the craft, and producer John Milson has it all calculated exactly. He even knows how many Dustroom coats make an army! And he knows that in Canberra there are support people working day and night to make it all happen."

The power of music cannot be long neglected. "I get an enormous buzz at the first orchestral dress-rehearsal. That will be a great occasion at Aida, and something not often experienced." With music such a great attraction, what about designing a ballet? "I've had one tempting offer but couldn't fit it in."

There was also a big television series. He turned it down too, for the same reason. Suddenly, without drama or fanfare, there emerges a story of commitment to opera companies, the difficulty of finding continuous work as a free-lance designer, and the importance of what Cooke simply calls "trust and follow-through" with companies to which he returns regularly. He does not use the word, but he is talking about loyalty on his part, and it goes far towards explaining why this patently talented designer is invited back again and again.

"Design is a study in observation

whether of temperature or colour, or whatever." Could there be a hint in that very certain statement of some of the reasons for that hideous Cost in North Queensland, where all those elements are so different from those in Sydney, Canberra, or Melbourne? The place of designers in our arts community is something that Peter Cooke speaks easily about. He is active in the Design Association, and is a member of the committee for the Prague Quadrennial. He enjoys watching other designers work, and was stimulated by a visit to London to plan with Anthony Besch, State Opera of South Australia's production last year of Lohr's opera, *Land of Smiles*.

Despite the tiny population of working stage designers in Australia and their remarkable camaraderie, there is no recognisable national style. In fact, no company has really developed and retained a house style.

As the interview winds down and one feels for the weariness induced by a working day that has so far come beyond a 5pm costume fitting session, and will go on to lighting in the theatre after dinner, some unexpected, diverse thoughts meander into the conversation. For example, the story of designing a stand for a disc jockey and dolly girls at a lifestyle exhibition. That is an experience not available to a designer who is tied to a theatre company.

Thoughts turn to the future, and the key word is once again trust. Peter Cooke will stay with opera for 1982, but is unable yet to name productions for which costumes are still ungaraged. He feels little control over the flow of work that will come. When the Queensland Opera Company folded, four design projects were scrapped. A change in the general management of a company can mean that the designer must start again from scratch to build up that all-important network of relationships.

Peter Cooke is remarkably relaxed about it all. There is no doubt that he sees interviews and publicity generally as a chance to further the cause of design. His designs speak eloquently for him, and he in turn is an articulate spokesman for them.



OPERA *review*

Standards of musical direction

by Ken Healey

Four operas in August (three of them for review) aimed to emphasise the truth that the quality of the music is central to the success of this art form. I found British in Canberra, Soviet in Adelaide, then Wagner and Donizetti in Melbourne. The English, French, German, and Italian traditions were thus represented by operatic norms of quality and I found myself comparing standards of musical direction.

Canberra Opera returned to Brecht's *The Town of the Sirens* in the 300-seat Playhouse. When seven years ago John Taylor had chosen from designer Peter Cooke a series of thick architectural features, much spelt behind a gauze. Brian Bell induced the same designer to ask most of his audience. This time the gauze was behind the singer, a single, open acting of arresting simplicity being used to suggest the oneness of life, whose Henry James's ghost story is set.

The production was impressive, memorable almost moving. What held it in check was the fact that Donald Holter's chamber orchestra had progressed as far only as mastering the notes in the score. Rhythms, shape the feel for style, the ability to name, nature, were all missing.

The most impressive element in the production turned out to be a performance, that of Martin Quade as the governor. A newcomer to opera in Australia, this singer uses his fine, warm (yet voice) as an expression of an appealing stage personality. The other adults all had mixed success. Margaret Cleary found the entrance of Mrs. Truitt a little high for comfort and missed some of the motherly simplicity of the character. Raymond George's tone has just the required English drawl for Peter Quene, but his diction has never been impressive. Joanne Russell's robust figure and voice will be seen and heard to better effect than as the woman. Miss Janet Cohn Feldman was quite the strongest Flora I have encountered, and Christine Huff-Johnson was an average Mido, but voice now more comfortable at the lower end of the scale range.

Brian Bell's production was daring, very much of the 80's, I thought, because it chose not to show too explicitly, but to hint at ghostly towns in the air, using light, shade, noise, and movement. Medieval playing from the pit combined

with less than adequate diction from two or three singers limited the production to a success of *degrees*. The ingredients were here for a convincing night's opera.

Dramatically, Brecht's opera is Bell's production was a clearly delineated contrast between a far from secure governor and the ghost of Peter Quene. The boy Miles is the object of the struggle. It is a pity that the object of the most uneven contrast between Don Pasquale and that trio of gay deceivers, Malatesta, Norma, and Ernesto, is not as clearly delineated by Donizetti's libretto as one of the world's most delightfully (and) comic operas. Which is the means and which the end in *Don Pasquale*? Dying the old duffer, or securing the knight's happiness? I suspect that the former aimed at leading to the latter, is an end in itself.

In *Don Pasquale* is primarily a fairly cruel come-uppance for a crusty old bachelor, then the Don had better be hand-baked. Towering of voice and presence, Noel Mangin's Don for Victoria State Opera turned out to be as well as a jolly and nearly as sweet. It was dramatically about the only weakness in John Milvan's masterly production (if one discounts the unconvincing sight of a young major alone playing at society).

One could for the most part enjoy Mangin's expressiveness in the role, but there was another struggle for recognition when the Sophronia-Norma duet was revealed. This was a shame because the director, Malatesta of John Wood and the keen intelligence of Deborah Cook's Norma deserved a more explicit. So did the dash and spirit of John Peckering's Ernesto. An available silver tone made light of most of the role's formidable demands, he looks as good as he sounds, and he put the question to Heather Legg's formidable double bass playing in *Perseus*: by playing immaculately the long trumpet introduction to his soulful aria which opens the second act and singing the cabaletta for good measure.

I cannot share the almost universal enthusiasm for the tiny but agile coherence of Deborah Cook. Neither alone nor accuracy provides any trouble to his voice, but if it turned well made out and stood on its head, I should say, "no what". In short it is the ideal voice for Lakota's "Bell Song" or those century workings of Donizetti heard, thankfully, only in aria contexts at odd-fashioned patricians. The pity of it is that outside that voice is an actress possessing virtually every quality of an committed and



John Peckering (Ernesto) and Deborah Cook (Norma) in the VSO's *Don Pasquale*

lighter, desirable in a young lyric coloratura soprano.

To return to the constraints of the orchestral playing, I must say that this *Fenestré* was exquisitely served by the players prepared by Richard Drell and conducted at the matinee performance I attended by Andrew Green. Peter Croke's designs (inspired from an original by Hugh Coleman) were neatly incorporated into the total production, but even I could quibble at the ripple of applause that greeted the fourth act garden scene.

And so to a performance in which the music was not only central but everything: the concert version of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* which the Australian Opera and the ABC presented in the Melbourne Town Hall. It was a triumph. Wagner's museum-theatrical about music drama, like Beethoven's, has been, partly because of the impact of his creative works. Nevertheless, if there is any opera composer the summit of whose achievement I want to approach gradually, score open on knee, that composer is Wagner and that summit is the *Ring* cycle. So much for the celebrated story of drama and music. Of course it is stated, in that the drama is inherent in the music. But at a distance of 111 years and with so much narrative separating the compositions between Siegfried and Siegfried, Siegfried and Brunnhilde, Fricka and Wotan, and finally Wotan and Brunnhilde, there is much to be said for making the pilgrimage to the Wagnerian shrine step by step. As a barrier against constraints so much more obviously on the score and its realisation, one does not have to look at the stage picture.

It was not a concert but an opera which Charles Mackerras and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (100 strong if one counts the irreplaceable suburban players) gave us. The drama was shaped by instruments and voices.

The score and the prodigious effort of concentration of Mackerras was rewarded by some sterling singing from Rita Hunter (Brunnhilde), Donald Slynn (Hunding) and Laura Elton (Fricka). Yet far beyond were the Siegfried of Naticc Carner, Robert Guard's Siegfried and all right Valéry-Kaymond Myers as Wotan. His lower register covensant, like and gliblike in being mindlessly tortured, but at the top one could never be sure of the vociferation. His May half vocal health return before the opera is inevitably staged, the evidence is too special to carry any such discernible weakness.



Joan Vaughan (Joan Vaughan)

Carmen — musicology misfires

by Michael Marley

If the State Opera's production of *Carmen* at times seemed to stomp both the spirit and the sense into a high-Wagnerian state of suspended animation, neither the singers nor the orchestra could fairly be blamed. At three hours and forty-five minutes playing time — admittedly with three intervals — it managed to be the longest production of the work I have sat through.

Unfortunately, it was not a question of excessive length, but simply of Denis Vaughan's pedantic and often overboard script. Mr Vaughan's musicological abilities are beyond dispute, and in case the uninitiated listener should miss the point, he has managed, in the programme notes for each production this year, to point out the Beethoven connection and his own discoverer work on Sullivan's *Pescara* and now *Wotan*'s scores. Unfortunately his academic discoveries do not — as, for example, in the case with Carlos Kleiber's work on Puccini and Weber — yield musical results. Rhythmic unity is essential to *Carmen*; there was precious little in this performance, and it was certainly not due to any failing on the orchestra's part, who played honestly and accurately.

Given the basic weaknesses of the tempo and rhythm, there was, however, much to admire in the work of individual singers — most notably, Judith Hendley's *Micaëla*. The sound as well-focused, expressive, true and the tone quite beautiful of this is a sample of Ms Hendley at her best, but *Flora* will be worth going a long way to hear. Moreover, her characterisation made the role much more interesting than the somewhat pallid and two-dimensional figure we are often given.

Rachel Gottler's *Carmen* was strong, sensuous and mostly well — if not excitingly — sung. The director's idea of having her lying languorously on her back for some of her scenes was a neat and effective suggestion of the voluptuous yet masochistic aspect of the character. And, even though it may sound odd, I must confess that for some reason beyond me, Ms Gottler's tone sounded warmer and truer in the soprano passages.

Donald Newman's Don José certainly looked the part — tall, dashing and handsome. But the relationship with *Carmen* really only caught fire in the final act

OPERA guide

ACT

CANBERRA PHILHARMONIA SOCIETY (470860)

The Gondoliers The popular Gilbert and Sullivan light opera Oct 29, 30, 31



Judith Richardson and John French in *Act's* *Marriage of Figaro*. Photo: Sharon Ginn

NSW

THE AUSTRALIAN OPERA

Opera Theatre 80H (26588) *Macbeth* by Verdi One of the Australian Opera's less happy Verdi productions John Copley's heavy-handed direction is matched by Stephanie Leonard's cumbersome costumes and sets. The revival is mainly notable for having Charles Mackerras conducting and Rite Hunter's last appearance in Australia in the role of Lady Macbeth. *The Marriage of Figaro* by Mozart (in English) Now the longest running production in the Australian Opera's repertoire, Copley's enduringly comic interpretation has more than stood the test of time, as have the designs by Gordon and Stennett. Thomas Schusback conducts for the first time Tosca by Puccini (in Italian). An end of season revival of John Copley's new production designed by Michael Stennett and Allen Lees. This time

conducted by Bill Reed. With Catherine Duxall in the title role and Raymond Myers as Scarpia. *The Bartered Bride* by Smetana (in English) The first production of this popular comic piece by the Australian Opera since 1957. An all-Czech production team takes charge: conductor, Frantisek Vajner, producer, Premysl Koc, designer, Sarka Hajna Sivboda, with Glenys Fowler as Maricka and Ron Stevens as Jenik. In repertoire throughout Oct. **NSW CONSERVATORIUM OPERA SCHOOL (274226)**

Verbruggen Hall. *The Corporation of Poppea* by Monteverdi. Conductor Myer Friedman, producer, Michael Beauchamp, designer, William Passmore, with students of the Opera School. Oct 13, 15, 17, 18

SA

STATE OPERA COMPANY (316161)

Opera Theatre. *The Barber of Seville* by Rossini (in English) Dennis Vaughan conducts a new production for the State Opera of this sparkling comic opera directed and designed by Tom Lingwood, features Judith Henley, Graeme Wall, Roger Howell and James Christensen. To Oct 19

VIC

ALEXANDER THEATRE (8432826)

The Mikado by Gilbert and Sullivan,

with the Blinn Players. Oct 8-17

VICTORIAN STATE OPERA (8432911)

The Princess Theatre. *Faust* by Gounod (in English) A new production for the Victorian State Opera by Anthony Beech with designs by John Stoddart. All performances are conducted by Richard Dwell. NZ tenor Keith Lewis joins John Cadden and Noel Mangin in an impressive cast. Starts Oct 16

WA

WA OPERA COMPANY

His Majesty's Theatre (3216288) *The Magic Flute* by Mozart (in English) The second production for the company by Jacobo Kauffmann following his successful *Tales of Hoffmann* earlier this year. Sets by Andrew Carter, music director Gerald Krug. Oct 16-31



Barbara Dickson as the title role of *Macbeth*

INTO THE FUTURE

A week-long workshop in August organised by the Victorian College of the Arts School of Dance brought together young choreographers and composers and produced an astonishing variety of results.

Thirty-eight dancers from the school volunteered to spend a week of their holidays as "instruments" of the choreographers' experiments — and often contributed creativity as well as performing skill to the short works that were prepared each day.

A literary system matched different dancers, choreographers and composers daily. You might get one dancer or four to work with, a star player or a clarinetist, a classically inclined choreographer or one experimenting in a minimalist style.

Only one of the choreographers came from the school. The others were from the Adelaide College of Arts and Education, the Australian Ballet School, Melbourne State College, Ruskin State College, Adelaide's Centre for the Performing Arts and dance groups in Tasmania, Victoria and New Zealand.

While most of them were at the embryonic stage, they were remarkable for their flexibility, originality and capability in tackling the exercises put to them by morning their dancers in pleasing and interesting ways. It was a most encouraging look at Australia's dance future.

THE OTHER MARTHA

One of the planners and participants in the VCA Dance School's workshop for choreographers and composers was Martha Hill, "the other Martha", as she is often referred to in order to distinguish her from Martha Graham, with whom she danced from 1929 to 1931.

At an age when most people have gradually dropped into retirement, Martha Hill continues to power the Juilliard School's dance division in New York. She was its founding director in 1951, and her influence on dance continues to spread around the world through the pupils who go through its intelligent and practical course.

In Australia, they include Nanette Hassell (performer and choreographer with Dance Exchange, now teaching in Melbourne) and Carole Johnson, director of the dance section of the Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Scheme.

Martha Hill first came to Australia in 1976 to take part in the Armadale choreographic school from which Graeme

Murphy emerged so excitingly. She was delighted that by the dance standard she saw and confident of its potential. Five years later, she is even more enthusiastic.

"Australia is the new frontier for dance in the Western World," she said in Melbourne last August. "Viewing it from New York, we have already seen wonderful dancers from Australia and this year we had the triumph of Graeme Murphy's company. Now, being in Australia and looking at what is going on here — the coexistence of the arts in Melbourne — I can speak directly about the School of Dance which, under the direction of Anne Woodburn and Jen Seapling, is phenomenal in quality, breadth of approach and breadth."

"They are training dancers who can go anywhere in the world. But what is most important is that these dancers — who could get into many companies in the United States — are deciding they are going to make their professional life here in Australia. If I were young, I would beg Australia to let me come and stay. To work."

"We in the US are related to Australians in that we have many of the same racial heritages, but the Australian mix is different. There is a special quality in the arts here that must be preserved, particularly since we have such easy communication across the world. I am happy to see the arts 'speaking Australian' and want it to stay that way."

SEPTUAGENARIAN FIREBALL

Another fireball septuagenarian swept through Australia's dance world in August: Joan Lawson, of the Royal Ballet School in London. Her studies with

Martha Hill



Margaret Morris and Annaïs in London, followed by instruction in Leningrad and Moscow, gave her both a lifelong dance background and a sense of anecdotes which she tells with infectious vigour.

While she came to Australia at the invitation of the Australian Ballet School, Joan Lawson did not confine herself to its pupils. She saw young dancers from big and small schools in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Canberra and Adelaide, and was generally impressed by the standard.

Only one thing consistently worried her, the point work. It was either up or down, she said, demonstrating a flat foot stiffly hoisted to a 90 degree angle. Looking for the source of the problem, she went to the point shoes that are made and used in Australia, and found them constructed quite differently from those in Europe — stronger and longer lasting maybe, but much less flexible. So concerned was she by the situation that she is taking the problem back to England with her to discuss it with colleagues there.

MARILYN JONES REAPPOINTED

Marilyn Jones, the first artistic director of the Australian Ballet to have come up through the company, has been reappointed for two years. This will take her to the end of 1983 and add up to five years in the job.

TRIALS OF KINETIKOS

The five dancers who make up Kinetikos Dance Theatre, Perth's contemporary dance group, are working hard in reduced circumstances this year to maintain their performance output.

All members of the group earn their living teaching with Terry Charleworth's Graduate College of Dance, and until late last year Graduate College support and administrative back-up made possible a regular program of Friday and Saturday evening sessions in the Graduate College's rented church hall premises.

Australia Council Theatre Board funding during 1980 and again this year brought Australian choreographer Jacqui Carroll to Perth to work with Kinetikos. The group has also been running a metropolitan schools performance program. The year they received a small grant from the WA Arts Council which covers the costs of organising and choreographing a schools program but does not include provision for costumes or salaries.

For the rest of 1981, the problem is to

DANCE

info

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find a performance venue to call home. They are trying out two-night stands at Churchlands College, at the University of Western Australia's Octagon Theatre, and in the main hall of the Perth Institute of Film and Television at Fremantle. They have great hopes of Fremantle where the Education Centre's new and successful Warner Theatre productions have been attracting lively, young audiences and where the dance group may have the chance later this year to work in association with drama.

ONE EXTRA WIN

Rhys Martin, a former member of Sydney's One Extra Dance Theatre has won a choreographic competition in Cologne, West Germany, in a contest between 28 entrants, many of them internationally experienced, from eight countries. He danced in the ballet with two One Extra colleagues who have been working in England, Caroline Ling and Lloyd Newson.

* Meanwhile, back in Sydney, One Extra Dance Theatre's artistic director, Kai Tai

Chan, is gearing up for a workshop season to be held at the Cleveland Street Performing Space in October. A revised version of *Parade Perpetua*, an expanded *Eyes on Tass* and a new dance work will make up the program with an experimental piece being devised by Kai Tai Chan, designer Silvia Jansson and lighting expert Kevin McKay. In 1982, the group will reform on its original basis of a permanent core of six dancers with the aim of keeping them in work for 30 weeks of a year.

HUNCHBACK: the build-up

by Jill Sykes

The success of the Australian Ballet's latest venture in original three-act ballets can only be gauged by what is seen on stage, and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* doesn't get its first airing until the 14th of this month, with a season in Sydney to follow from the end of November.

But if teamwork, effort, craftsmanship and planning count for anything, it should be a tightly constructed dance dramatisation with exciting visual and aural appeal. Victor Hugo's classic novel has been compressed by the stage director George Ogilvie to a scenario that encapsulates the themes of love, lust, ugliness and beauty in the original. It has been designed by Kristian Fredriksson with not only his usual flair for dressing the rich, but also his ability to enhance the individuality of every character on stage — every detail down to the leather mouthpiece for the epileptic beggar has been planned. Music by Bartok has been selected by the Australian Ballet's music director, Dobbs Franks, and shaped with maximum reference to the original.

While all these preparations were going on, the ballet's choreographer, Bruce Wells, was waiting in the wings. A young American who is resident choreographer of the Boston Ballet, he spent a week in Australia in January bopping ideas around with the three other principal members of the creative team. In March, Ogilvie went to him for a second consultation, and many a communication was sent across the Pacific in between.

It wasn't until August that Wells finally saw the AB dancers, measured their abilities and began work on the choreographic expression of all the other aspects of the production — the one by which it will ultimately be judged. A preview of his unstinted

efforts suggests that he won't fall short in the area of craftsmanship, though he may not crown their achievements with peaks of choreographic inspiration. Only time and the finished product can tell.

Certainly *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* has come a long way since its auspicious beginning a year ago. Subscribers may recall being invited to pay up for a 1981 program which included that work choreographed by Peter Darrell. "NOW a few full-length ballets spectacular!" The cognisanced "now" proved to be premature. Darrell, who is Artistic Director of the Scottish Ballet, pulled out of the project and another choreographer had to be found for the non-existent but heavily promoted production.

Wells had been spotted in Peking when two AB executives went to see his version of *La Fille Mal Gardée* while the Australian company was on tour in China last year. He was later invited to submit ideas on the *Hunchback* project, and did so. But he heard nothing until he had a summons

in the middle of the Boston Ballet's Christmas season, at which he was dancing the Cavalier in *The Merry Widow*. He couldn't get here until the AB had dispersed on holiday, but he got the job nonetheless.

"The dancers here have a level of maturity to accept a challenge. I have never worked as a choreographer with a company as developed as this," says Wells, a former soloist with the New York City Ballet. "At the Boston Ballet, I don't have dancers of the level of Kelvin Coe, or with the maturity and training of the Kozlov. And that is affecting my interpretation."

The principal dancers involved in creating the main roles, at least two in each one, are Michèle Kirkaldie and Valentina Korlova as Esmeralda, Paul de Masson and David Burch, Quasimodo, Kelvin Coe and Gary Norman, Phoebus, Duke Baker and Leonard Korlova, Phoebus, Lynette Mart, Jeanne Michel and Terese Power, Frollo.

Wells danced out his own choreography as he worked, going into each session with an idea of what he wanted as a whole but with no specific dance phrases in mind. "I go in and just start moving," he says of his choreographic approach. "I find I have a physical response to what I am doing. I feel when I have done enough of one thing and need to go on to the next thing. I could dance it all out first in my bedroom, but I find I have a stronger physical response to myself in the studio. And it's much faster working that way."

Bartok's music being neither camp-pah or pom-tiddy-pom, Wells wrote out a complete exercise book of counts before he began. Every musical phrase in the score was there, and each choreographic phrase grew out of it with the help of the AB's principal pianist Wendy Pomroy at the piano and the tape recorder controls.

Dobbs Franks (Music of Diversity), Bruce Wells (Choreographer) and George Ogilvie (Producer) AB's *Hunchback*. Photo: Ian Baker



feature

It's an exciting selection of music which was chosen after Debbie Funnis had flirted with the idea of a French composer, trying everyone from Moussorgsky to Messiaen, and then turning to the Russian romance of Rachmaninoff. Once he'd thought of Bartok, he couldn't imagine why he hadn't chosen him in the first place. "I don't think there's any composer who has more of a feeling of dance. As a producer, George breathed heavily when he heard it, as a choreographer, Bruce could hardly stay in his seat, as a musician, I was in orbit."

"There is a great deal of humour in Bartok, but all of it has a slightly bizarre edge to it. It's never *hahaha*, it always has an element of tragedy, which is perfect for the ballet. We have made a point of never using less than a movement or, in the case of the excerpts from *The Wooden Prince*, a complete section. I have had to orchestrate only one piece and write one bridging section. It is phenomenal how it has all come together. Mind you, we listened to a trillion hours of Bartok."

The figure score is made up from movements and sections of the *Concerto for Orchestra*, *Musik for Strings*, *Percussion and Celeste*, *Dance Suite*, *Suite No 1*, *Divertimento for Strings*, *String Quartet No 4*, *Concerto* and *The Wooden Prince*, one of the two ballets that Bartok wrote. And nearly all of them needed to be woven down to a coherent piano script for rehearsal - a mammoth task in itself.

"We decided against a leitmotif, as it has been done to death. Instead, we tried for a continuity of mood and dramatic entry, as dictated by the music. I think the sound you will associate with *Hammerheads*, for example, is the clarinet; it is often the featured instrument when she is dancing. All we had to do was to try not to use any brass clarinet exposition for anyone else."

George Ogilvie is keen to give Victor Hugo his due as the starting point of the whole operation: "As I read the novel, I could take out a lot of it and



Designer Britton Fredriksson directing the First Prince, Jan Balazs

actually mine to it. So when I had to translate that into dance terms, it came very quickly. Then it was interesting to see how the design developed and built the script. And after that, it was so exciting to see Bruce work. In six months of that coming out on the floor, so my mind everything we have ever talked about."

Ogilvie is, of course, best known for his productions of straight theatre and of opera. But he worked with Dame Peggy van Praagh two years ago on the AB's new production of *Coppelia*, making use of his dance training, though, ironically, that was done in Paris with Jacques Le Coq at a time when he believed only in searching for Truth through realism and wouldn't let a dancer into his studio.

"*Hammerheads* really could not have happened without the experience of *Coppelia*. Before that, I was scared that the language of ballet might defeat me. And I would only take on a story ballet, in which I felt I might be of some use. What I find so helpful is that the dancers know how I work and come up to me to discuss their characters. It is just such a fascinating process."

As preparations continued in the AB's Melbourne headquarters, it was hard to know who was most excited. Even quiet Kim Fredriksson was quite visible about his commission to design and supervise the making of nearly 200 costumes of the medieval period, an unusual time for a ballet to be set. He is determined that *Hammerheads* should not be just another ballet extravaganza to delight the eye, and hopes that he has done his bit towards making the participants seem like real people, rich and poor, sad and happy, good and bad. "We are hoping to create a real society and not just a ballet society."

With all these hopes ahead of them, it was no wonder Bruce Wells couldn't resist a topical gesture for support when he named the Cathedral of Notre Dame for the first time earlier this year. He lit four candles in the names of Franks, Fredriksson, Ogilvie and Wells.

A Taste of the Big Apple for Perth

by Terry Owen

The West Australian Ballet Company brought a rare taste of New York to Perth audiences in August.

The company's spring season of four works at His Majesty's Theatre included George Balanchine's *Allegro Brillante*, and a pas de deux by ex-New York City Ballet dancer John Clifford, now heading the Los Angeles Ballet.

The costs of presenting *Allegro Brillante* — and those included two American guest artists, and rehearsals in Perth with Victoria Simon, one of Balanchine's four assistants — were met by a Texas organisation, Creation Foundation Inc., a non-profit body which spends some of its money on making sure that American dance is seen outside the US.

Guest artists Johanna Kirkland and Clark Tippet did the Foundation's work very nicely, thank you. Ms Kirkland, who was a guest with the WA Ballet Company last year in their revival of *K4L*, is principal ballerina with the Los Angeles Ballet. She trained at the New York City Ballet's School of American Ballet, and has danced in many Balanchine works.

Clark Tippet is a principal dancer with American Ballet Theatre, the New York-based company which has built a powerful reputation and a enormous audience with a repertoire that includes all the dance classics and major modern works, and a policy of staging world-famous games. Mr Tippet has danced leading roles right across the repertoire, and is a beautiful partner.

Ms Kirkland was all demure, boneless grace in the Clifford pas de deux which pays homage to the great Russian Imperial Theatre classical tradition. Clark Tippet's powerfully calm stage presence and athletic build were a marvelous foil for his ethereal partner.

There was more homage to the Imperial tradition in Balanchine's lovely *Allegro Brillante*, danced to the Tchaikovsky 3rd Piano Concerto. Artistic Director Garth Welch and Victoria Simon as visiting teacher schooled the company hard to meet the combination of speed and elegant classicalism that is Balanchine's trademark. There were awkward moments, and some sloppy footwork, but the guest principals

pulled the work together and delivered the big moments of this pure dance piece with a clarity assurance we rarely see in Perth.

The programme's opening work, *Family*, is a commissioned piece for six dancers by Australian Dance Theatre dancer-choreographer Joseph Scoglio, set to one of Bonhoeffer's late spring quartets.

It seemed to me a risky business using such sublime music to underwrite a dance may be family relationships, but after a close-to-banal opening sequence the work developed its own dramatically satisfying momentum.

Scoglio used the generous stage of His Majesty's fully in sequence of partnered and solo dancing full of the supple, amiable energy on the ground and in the air that characterises his modern dance vocabulary.

It was good to see a classically strong performer like Timothy Storey enjoying the chance to work in a different dance medium.

Jacques Murphy, also new to the company this year, has the long, powerful line and speed to suit Scoglio's choreography. She will hopefully do the role of the mother greater justice when she learns to project through the steps and the technique to the meaning of what she is dancing.

The full company was used for *The Tempest*, Garth Welch's well crafted piece which whipped through a synopsis of Shakespeare's play at a fast clip. Produced

for a secondary schools programme earlier this year, the work has lots of energy and appeal. The costume design and John Williams' music are reminders of how much we all enjoyed *Star Wars*.

The choreography was a lively, shapely but which Michele Ryan and Geoffrey Rayment in particular handled well. A bit more stagecraft and theatrical wit all round would put a polish to the piece's high energy level.

Like most triple bills, this spring programme worked the small company of 12 dancers fairly hard across an interesting diversity of dance styles. The result was an exciting and satisfying mix, with successful new works by Australian choreographers, good company dancing, and the heady thrill of seeing internationally acclaimed guest stars live up to their reputations.

The success the company had with its 8.30pm start family performances of *Peter Pan* last May encouraged them to repeat the idea. This time they varied the programme for the family audiences, giving them *Peter and the Wolf* and Charles Country's agreeable *Swan Day*, as well as the Balanchine ballet and the pas de deux.

Appealing to the whole family as the basic audience and for dance in Western Australia is an ongoing strategy for the company, which will be presenting a new Garth Welch production of *Cinderella* at His Majesty's in November.



Johanna Kirkland and Clark Tippet in Balanchine's *Allegro Brillante*.

review



Jason Bailey and Nathan Shaw in *Poppy*. Photo: Anneke Oliver

Poppy — a testament of Murphy

by Bill Shoubridge

Having returned from their USA tour, full of the appreciation, sanction and bewilderment of American audiences and critics and before setting off for seasons at Sadlers Wells and the Hong Kong Festival (government patronage from the Australia Council permitting), the Sydney Dance Company managed somehow to get the Regent Theatre for a return season of Murphy's *Poppy*.

They have shown that a local company need have no fear of the huge (3000 seat) capacity of the place and that Sydney audiences (pushed no doubt by the knowledge that the company is a bit on the Big Apple) have grown alarmingly, due to the SDC's self confidence.

The Company will also be taking the new *Poppy* on its next tour (one of their dearest wishes is to let France see it) and presumably will return even more flushed with success from that venture.

Once upon a time, three years ago to be exact, *Poppy* was a watermark. It represented not only the first attempt to make a full length ballet by an Australian choreographer, composer and designers, but the first real attempt by a so called "regional" company to do it on their own.

Bill Shoubridge and Gwynne Murphy in the Poppy Tango in Poppy. Photo: Anneke Oliver



Now, all the State companies have done it. ADT has *Wickiass* (with two more full length works in the pipeline within the next six months), West Australian Ballet has *KAL*, and Queensland Ballet has a full evening version of *Coram*.

What has happened to *Poppy* is not that it is now an historical oddity, but a representation of the Sydney Dance Company's style. More to the point, it is a debilitation of its choreographer's manner, a "Testament of Murphy" if you like.

Poppy started out as a wild and mostly extravagant of intimations and vignettes, when last seen in Melbourne it was a rather cramped series of tableaux vivants. It is now what I think it was trying to be all the time, an arching, rhapsodic (and a pensive) score poem.

Jean Cocteau stands more serenely at the centre of his universe than he did formerly and there is a more substantial whiff of that Cocteauque poetry that Gasset described as a mingling of "mystic and formaldehyde".

Much as he made in publicity about the changes in choreography and score and how Kristian Fredriksson revised the costume designs, but the structure of the piece remains basically as it was and far as, this is why the ballet as a whole remains unshakingly, though at the same time as exhilarating and aggravating as it always was.

Act 1, describing the experiences and incidents that shaped Cocteau up until the death of his lover, Raymond Radiguet, still darts about, but now, with a keener cutting edge to parts of it (the Paris Salon scene for example) seems more pernickier than ever. Murphy still lifts us up on his shoulders to have a peek over the wall at a moment in Cocteau's formative years but then gets tired and drags us on to the next "significant step".

Act 2 with its first dazzling flash of light, urinating electronic noises and seductively shuffling gaundin theme throws us unceremoniously into the luminous madness of Cocteau's mind, madness and poetic uranism. From here on it only follows an ever changing panorama of character, choreography and effect, so different from the jagged, jittery structure of Act 1.

It has many difficulties for a viewer not familiar with anything of Cocteau, difficulties different in kind and manner from those previously. There is no identification in costume for the various "scoons" of Cocteau's creativity, Orpheus and Euridice

are initially unrecognisable from Merik and Guinevere. Thus I suppose could be put down to the "Mr Sheep" job that Frederiksen has done with the set and costumes, but they always were terribly bland and intellectual theoretically, and will remain so.

It rankles more that the wifal and rich drama of Act 2 we used to see has disappeared. Murphy has tried to blend and clarify what was there before, but somehow he's merely emboldened and homogenised it. What manages to save it, however, is the basic choreography; it has changed and for the better. It is practically the only element that has differentiation, and it has it in purely "movement" terms. Hitherto we have seen Murphy's "testament" in terms of his theatricality, his affection for the exotic, perverse and untamed, his awareness of the flickering changes between force, lyricism and the black underbelly of life and a sense of the replaceability of Fate and evanescence of existence. What we now discover is his "testament" in terms of his own principal means of expression, the mathematics and vocabulary of its form. These wonderful centralistic elements of dance come spinning out of a steadily trending theme — nothing exists to be beautiful in its own right, it exists only to expand the general horizon and deepen the perspective.

What makes it sometimes difficult to follow and follow is Murphy's occasional inability to clarify and compress sometimes intractable material and tie it together.

Take the moment towards the end of the ballet when down comes the front screen and short, tantalising excerpts from *Ophelia*, *Testament du Daphne* and *Beauty and the Beast* are shown. In the earlier version, these were shown simultaneously on three huge screens at the back of the stage and they blended into an enthralling kaleidoscope of motion and sound. Now (whether by design or by the limits of the Regent Theatre stage) they come between the audience and the ballet.

Peggy is a work I love seeing and love arguing about, but I wish there could be more of Cocteau in it. But these are "impressions" of Jean Cocteau and Genevieve Murphy's impressions of that, so, as it is so it will remain.

The chorus of alibis in the press both here and in America has been long and loud about *Peggy*. It, having a resistance to the conception and form, are just like the eternal song at the cocktail party.



Two Performers: Carl Morris and Genevieve Murphy in *Peggy*. Photo: Brian Goss

ACT

KINETIC ENERGY DANCE COMPANY

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NSW

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Her Majesty's Theatre (2212777). *The Merry Widow*. Australia's own singalong ballet. The company's most popular money-splener. Oct 23-29

VIC

THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET

Palais Theatre (5348651). *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Premiere season of a reworking of the classic novel. Choreographer, Bruce Wells, producer, George Ogilvie, designer, Kristian Fredrikson. Oct 14-20.

Heady musical excitement

by Fred Blanks

If all of Mozart's surviving music were played end-to-end, it would take just under eight and a half days to get through it. With Haydn, you would be listening for just over 14 days — but then, he lived a lot longer. Handel's music would take 12 and a half days, and for some other famous composers the durations are as follows: Schubert five and a half days, Bach nearly seven and a half days, Beethoven almost exactly five days, Purcell just a few hours less, and Dvorák three and a quarter days. Verdi with some 57 hours of music beats Wagner who scores 51 hours. Perhaps the record-holders would be Tchaikovsky and Vivaldi, but their music is incompletely catalogued and hence difficult to add up.

These figures come from a study which I undertook a few years ago and which became the source of articles published here and in England. The subject was the diligence of famous composers. Let us take the investigation a little further.

If you consider the actual life-span of the composers, and also the number of years during which they actually composed music, and then divide the hours of music composed by the life-years and the composing-years, you arrive at a direct comparison of their legacy of effective work. There are traps in the calculations (for example, much music is out of print, and one has to take it by making estimates or comparing it to similar available pieces) but even so the results are fascinating. This is not the place for listing them all, but let me quote my own conclusions from one of the previously published studies:

The most frequently performed composers wrote, on average, just 114 minutes of music for every year of their lives, and 174 minutes for every year of their composing activity. On a basis of total life span, the most diligent composers were Mozart, Haydn, Schubert and Handel; they were the only ones to write more than four hours of music for every year of their lives. On the basis of composing years, the productivity prizes go to Schubert, Purcell, Mozart and Haydn with over six hours of music for each active year.

Kurt Sanderling conducting the Sydney Symphony Orchestra

One could almost think that the first three of these composers had a premonition of early death, and compensated with a hectic working pace. Some composers, like Chopin, Debussy and especially Ravel, built a reputation on a remarkably slender output of less than an hour of music — in the case of Ravel, less than half-an-hour — per year of his life. By and large, composers worked harder in Vienna than in Paris.

It appears, therefore, that composing less than a couple of hours of music per year — call it half-a-minute's music per day — will not impair your chances of being remembered as a great composer. If the quality is right!

So much for hard-working composers.

Changing direction, let us look at some of the hard work by performers during August, a month in which many of the leading indigenous groups materialised on concert platforms. Most of them brought something new.

The Lacrosse Concert, appearing for Musica Viva in the Heritage Series centred in the NSW Art Gallery, introduced *The Company of Lovers*, a cycle of portraits in which David Matthews, a young English composer who has spent some time here and who treats women sympathetically with an album that reminds you of his studies with Benjamin Britten, sets Australian poems by Judith Wright and David Campbell. The Synergy Percussion ensemble of leading youngsters from the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, also had a gallery venue when the Seymour Group presented them in the S H Ervin Gallery of the National Trust at Observatory Hill. There they produced virtually every conceivable pecked and unpecked percussive noise in four weeks that showed how much contrast is available to their medium — a melodic and vaguely oriental sound with piano by Peggy Glanville — *Alcks, Hylks*

by Gerard Bingley, *How The Stars Were Made* by Peter Southgate (recovering from a serious car accident) and the *Procession Quaver* by Colin Bingle. All four composers were present to late the music.

The University of NSW Ensemble, now led by valiant Geoffrey Michaels in place of John Harding who must devote most time to the Australian Chamber Orchestra and Sydney String Quartet, played *For Sakharov* (The Voice Of The Whale) by the American avant-garde George Crumb, who does for the conscious heard more or less what Messiaen did for birds, namely allow his fantasy to run rings around the sounds he imagines them making. In the case of the crunched whale, the transfiguration is far flatter, colder and pinner.

Then there was the Matagong Trio (without John Harding, cellist Nathan Waks, pianist John Winibar) with Musica Viva recitals in the Seymour Centre, their finest playing was reserved for the dramatic Opus 30 trio of Tchaikovsky. Nothing new from there, nor from a group of ancient instruments and music ensemble called Cantic Consort appearing for Alliance Française. But an unusual facet of novelty came in a two-piano recital in which David Holland and David Stanhope revelled their way through a fantasy by Percy Grainger on themes from Grieg's *Porgy And Bess*.

A populous parade of imported musicians was audible during the month. Two large and youthful assemblies gave Conservatorium concerts on their way home from the Fifth Australian Youth Music Festival in Melbourne — the 46-member Youth Orchestra of Greater Philadelphia with forthright fortissimo in works by Rensky-Komarov and Delia Jono, and the 46-member Hong Kong Jng Ying Chamber Orchestra which was conspicuously careful with Western music by Mendel-

sohn, Beethoven and Debuss but generously nosing in oriental works by Dango Lian and Tseng Leung-Yik.

But the five most heady musical excitements I have left until last, and had they been played end-to-end, they would fortunately have taken up a goodly proportion of available music-time.

East German conductor Kuan Sanderling mesmerised the Sydney Symphony Orchestra into playing of a spirit and passion that they do not often make available for other conductors, his performance of Tchaikovsky's *Pacificque* had all the broad and persuasive sincerity that one would expect from a conductor who had a long association with orchestras in Moscow and Leningrad. With him we heard Cuban-born pianist Jorge Bolet, who can apply something like a hundred lobes of piano power to the keyboard, and did so to striking effect in the two piano concertos of Lant, these were performances that must be regarded, except for a smudged note here and there, as definitive.

Both these artists came from the ABC stable. Two further examples of musical memorability came from Musica Viva. The Quarteto Beethoven (De Roma) tapped a wide repertoire, from the French quintet (with violinist Antonio Salvatore) to works by Martini, Schoenberg and Schumann, with playing that upheld the best standards of chamber-music. The vocal equivalent of this came from the New Swingle Singers, incredible acrobats of the voice, slick in presentation and universal in musical response.

Finally, there was a chance of hearing a Stradivarian violin, allegedly once played by Paganini himself, when Mita Pogacnik, born in Yugoslavia but largely American-trained, performed solo sonatas by Bach and Bartok. Though not yet quite equal to the grandeur of the Chaconne, he has the front-line of the violin brigade firmly within his sights.

The New Swingle Singers



BOOKS

The quotidian raised to the metaphysical

by John McCallum

A Nice Night's Entertainment by Barry Humphries. Currency Press, (pp.319\$5).

Barry Humphries' comic monologues are closely linked with his own performance of them. At least in the short term, the main appeal of *A Nice Night's Entertainment* will be for his enthusiastic audiences to relive their favourite moments — hearing again in imagination the rapping tones of Dame Edna, the meanderings of Sandy Stone, and the whole host of characters through which Humphries has recorded and commented on the Australian scene. When occasionally you come upon a sketch which you have not heard, the effect is suddenly rather flat. Without the manner of Humphries' comic delivery the monologues can easily be read as rather straightforward, nostalgic bits of the minutiae of Australian social life.

If the book is to have the lasting value which its presentation suggests the publishers expect, then it is fair to look for other qualities. One of the traditional tests of a published theatrical script is, is it playable, by other performers? Humphries is a great performer, there can be no doubt. One of the chief interests in this book, however, must be its quality as a writer of material which others may one day perform.

The pleasant surprise which this book offers, then, is that many of the pieces read as much more than a simple record of a great theatrical artist's material. Many of them, of course, are specifically related to their original performance. Some are in fact rather obscure to read. The early Sandy Stone songs, and those for characters such as Buster Thompson (a "tough ex-public school boy"), Rex Lear ("venomous"), Neil Singleton (a grotesquely full-wing "intellectual") and Big Sonia (a "magnificent" woman folk singer) rely very heavily on the accuracy of their original social observation. It is also strongly



easy to read whole sketches without at first realising the number of pages it forms. This is the trouble with satirical material where the laughs depend on recognition of the objects of satire. Like all satire it is transient. Once people forget what Harpic is, a whole dimension will be lost.

There have been comparisons drawn between Humphries and the early Baz Luhrmann — in that both have a wonderful eye for the minutiae of Australian suburban life, though Baz's observations serve a more universal artistic purpose. With some of the songs in this book Humphries demonstrates the same. In particular the later Sandy Stone sketches (ironically, after he "died") show a mature comic vision which transcends the feeling that some of the earlier sketches were written simply to prove that Humphries is extraordinarily conversant with the minutiae of Australian social life. "Sandy Stone (you can't win the Lucky Spot all year bloke)" and "Sandy and the Sandman" are something much finer. The worst bit is that I can't say it to quote it.

I'm a firm believer that we're all given a little warning we're going to catch in our chips just to give us a chance to make a little speech for posterity. That's how I know for certain that what I had just then — that checker — was nothing more or less than a reminder to being a rusty dream. *A cheer?* I mean, if, for argument's sake, I'd been awake and I really had dropped off the twig, coughed in my chips, kicked off, pegged out, found the road too weary and the hell too steep to climb, fallen asleep in the arms of the Almighty, let the matter drop, or been gathered — if I'd been gathered my last words would have been ridiculous. My last words would have been a lot of twaddle and a lot of howls.

My last words would have been, "Only half a pint today please Mike. Money under brick P.S. Nothing tomorrow."

The capacity to raise the quotidian to the level of the metaphysical is what makes Chekhov, Beckett, Grass and dozens of other 20th century character geniuses. Humphries is up there with them only in isolated moments, but considering that he has to perform the material himself this is an extraordinary achievement.



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THESPIA'S PRIZE CROSSWORD No. 35

ACROSS

1. Dad's attempt to make a crust? (8)
4. Strange girl I live with like grandfather (8)
10. Lungs much needed for snort? (6,4)
11. Easy, we hear, doesn't last! ... (5)
12. ... violence ... or not in anger? (7)
13. Sort of clothes for going in? (7)
14. Helpers caught on air and escaped later (5)
15. Show drunken Vince a gin chug (8)
16. "But, as I am a man soldier I think this child to be my lady" (King Lear) (8)
20. Correct the journalist who keeps around males? (5)
23. How to demons - give revolutionary a cage (7)
25. Tergues at home with a model? Offshore! (8)
26. Characteristic of artist to unfold himself in a bird (5)
27. Month-old baby? (3,7)
28. Usually find one character behind a number at the edge of the beach (4)
29. Agree to a rise, it's said (6)

DOWN

1. Sort of muscle needed to distribute hair crop successfully (8)
2. Knock out Edward for not mauling up? (7)
3. Give graffiti tags with vehicle for the last ride decked in colour (9)
5. Embellishments on Manx's 1 portion (14)
7. Adopt a small boy? (5)
9. Trouble caused by dog backing into stranger? (7)
8. Ornate flower shows at this time of year (6)

9. Player rehabilitates image hands with two quad (4,8)
16. Varied reactions about the works of his hands (9)
17. Supporter of publicity in this place up north (8)
19. Style of ball delivery finished weapon (7)
21. Copy a bird (eleventh) (7)
22. Vinegary expert on twitch (4)
24. See father and Spanish uncle in the courtyard (8)

SOLUTION No. 34



The first correct entry drawn on October 25 will receive one year's free subscription to T4.

The winner of the last crossword was Mr Colin Capwell of Potts Point, NSW.

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